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**The Dissertation Committee for Shanya Dennen Cordis Certifies that this is the approved version of the following dissertation:**

**(Un)settling Dispossession: Neoliberal Development, Gender Violence, and Indigenous Struggles for Land in Guyana**

**Committee:**

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Circe Sturm, Supervisor

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Shannon Speed

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Simone A. Browne

---

Edmund T. Gordon

---

Charles R. Hale

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and Indigenous Struggles for Land in Guyana**

**by**

**Shanya Dennen Cordis, B.S., M.A.**

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## **Dedication**

To my family, near and far, who rooted me throughout the lulls and the storms.

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# **(Un)settling Dispossession: Neoliberal Development, Gender Violence, and Indigenous Struggles for Land in Guyana**

Shanya Dennen Cordis, PhD

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Supervisor: Circe Sturm

*(Un)settling Dispossession: Neoliberal Development, Gender Violence, and Indigenous Struggles for Land in Guyana* examines how and why conditions of indigenous land dispossession and gendered racial violence against indigenous women persist, even accelerate, in a context where indigenous rights are ostensibly upheld by the state. Based on eighteen months of collaborative ethnographic fieldwork, this project maps the conditions structuring indigenous political subjectivities through an analysis of three distinct, yet related topics: neoliberal state development and recognition, gender and sexual violence, and the quotidian lived experience of indigenous territorial struggles. Grounded in a feminist political economic perspective, this project brings into conversation critical feminist geography and anthropological perspectives on space, territory, and the body with critical scholarship on race, indigeneity, and recognition.

This study posits that the Guyanese state retains territorial authority, even as it recognizes indigenous collective land rights, through social and spatial orders that operate through neoliberal logics, or a (re)territorialization of indigenous lands. As such, territorial rights granted by the state have become the essential counterpart or accessory of authorized dispossession as the state's conferral of rights paradoxically reinforces patriarchy (and attendant violence) against and within indigenous communities, placing indigenous peoples within a space of corporeal-spatial precarity. These processes operate in tandem with the racial-sexual representation of the indigenous female 'body,' which manifest in

the gendered violence to which they are subjected. The violence indigenous women experience, as a racial and gendered process of dispossession, must be understood in relation to the pervasive gender violence Creole (descendants of enslaved Africans and East-Indian indentured servants) women experience, in particular the black female body.

Broadly, this project maps intersecting colonial legacies of dispossession—indigenous displacement, slavery, and indentureship—which structure the complex relations between indigenous and majority Creole descendants and the state. While indigenous mobilizing efforts must negotiate assertions of state sovereignty, as well as Creole claims of belonging, these contentions also point to the space(s) in which indigenous political subjectivities challenge the nation-building project. Ultimately, this study attends to the mundane spaces of indigenous struggles for land, the mutually constitutive processes of land and body dispossession, and how the paradoxical space to which indigenous peoples are relegated, as hypervisible and invisible, also constitutes the ground upon which indigenous futures are imagined and constructed.

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## Preface

*Northwest* has always figured as a fixed geographical point within my mind, from a young age listening to my father's stories of growing up in the village of Barabina Hill in Guyana. My entry point to this research project is also a story of my own journey as a black and indigenous woman, a story of sorts that is intertwined with reclamation of a distant homeland accessible through memories, photos, and an imaginary of my father's homeland. This ethnography, as much a compilation of the situated experiences, voices, histories, and thoughts of the people I lived and worked with—the descendants of enslaved Africans, indentured East Indians and Amerindians, is also a story of my own embodied experience, what I have come to understand as a calling of the self home.

I had traveled to Guyana for several years before I returned to my father's ancestral home in Region 1, known as *Barima-Waini*, a massive stretch of land situated along the northeastern border with Venezuela, west of the largest river, the Essequibo, the Barima-Waini region, simply known as the "Northwest District." Named after two major rivers that crossed across the region—the Barima River and the Waini River—the heavily forested coastal region borders the Atlantic Ocean to the north and Venezuela to the west. Inaccessible by road from the capital of Georgetown, the only way to access the region is an unenviable two-day journey by boat, at the time known as *Lady Northboat*, or an hour-long flight in a single-engine plane.

My memories of the land overlap with the emotive stories my father shared with me throughout my childhood. An amalgam of nostalgia would resonate in his voice, his eyes remembering other places and times I could not see. He shared with me stories of

village life, growing up as one of the few “black buck,” or mixed black-Amerindian children in the village, and later, his experiences during his brief return from the States in the 90s. My own desire for a sense of belonging as a black and indigenous child mirrored his own sense of alienation growing up during a period of tumultuous racial conflict during the 1960s in Guyana.

Through his stories I was called home. And for those that live within a “trans” space, claiming home, land, and place is a political move as much as it is an affective desire for belonging and community. As stories tend to do, they take on an aura, embedded with the affective residues of the storyteller. And so, the constraints and limits my father experienced because he was a “black buck,” presented itself as a cautionary tale against romanticizing my expectations of homecoming. I would be entering into a nexus of historical wounds and traumas inflicted through colonialism, racial, gender, class, and spatial hierarchies. And I would be slotted into place, categorized and made ‘sense of,’ in ways that were paradoxically liberating and affirming, even as they were violent, constraining, and limiting. Returning to my father’s village, I was able to establish my own connections to community and family.

“He pay the driver probably a month’s worth of salary,” my great-grandmother laughed, deeply amused. The grooves in the side of her face lifted momentarily.

She was recounting my father’s return home to the village after having lived overseas for nearly two decades. She was perched on the red velvet couch, the cushions worn to the frame. The blue film surrounding her dark eyes twinkled with light as she told me how she had ran partially down the hill, a steep terrain that became treacherous

during the rainy season, the road inundated with water from the surrounding swamp. I smiled, imagining her small frame, barely reaching five feet, racing to meet him. She was younger then, and despite her eighty-something year old body, remained a tough version of her former self. Leaving for my father caused a deep fissure in his life, and signaled an entirely different way of life. He recounted to me, repeatedly for my own voracious requests of glimpses of the land he felt displaced from, that Brooklyn was a stark contrast to life in the village. He fought daily, easily recognized for his strong accent and appearance. His parents' attempts to help him fit in through decorum of respectability and its attendant performance of industrious work ethic only emphasized that difference.

Toward the back of the village, in the area they called the back dam, there was a family farm, where my grandmother explained, they grew sweet and bitter cassava, and other things like coffee. From my great-grandparents house stretched an expanse of forest—interspersed with fruit trees and coconut trees—briefly descending into a valley before swelling again in the distance. The singular dirt road that cut through the village up the steep hill, wide enough for two vehicles to pass simultaneously, was a point of entry but also a regular problem for the community. During rainy season, or simply when it rained, the bridge that traversed the swampy area at the bottom of the hill overflowed and made transportation impossible. Planks of wood were placed haphazardly along the side of the bridge for village residents to cautiously make their way across. The state of neglect of the village became worse after my grandfather, who at one point had been village leader, passed away.

“We have plenty land,” She said, as she placed a piece of fruit in her mouth. She

pointed in the distance, her red polka dot dress hanging loosely on her frame, her short graying straight hair smoothed flat against her head.

“From these coconut and pear trees, all around ’til hill bottom foot, is we land,” She stared ahead, not merely because her mind wandered between memories or overlapped with recounting the past and the present, but also because her eyes had gradually succumbed to incessant cataracts and a grayish blue film permanently altered her once dark brown eyes. She reached in my direction.

“We don’t have to buy meat, we don’t have to buy fish, because well your grandfather, he does hustle for all of them things, he going to hunt and catch fish...got he own boat and engine. But, now, pure shop. We have to go to the shop.” She sighed, exasperated that the subsistence she had once obtained directly from the land to maintain her family’s livelihood had been gradually displaced by the market economy of the shop. Food that had been cultivated in the region had become increasingly supplanted by food transshipped from surrounding small townships like Mabaruma settlement or the capital of Georgetown. It also reflected the increasing movement of the youth away from farming, toward quicker economic returns prompting many to work in the mining areas. Many of the young men in the region worked in Port Kaituma or Matthew’s Ridge, well-known, remote mining towns further inland. The expectation that the richness of the region’s mineral resources translated into wealth for miners meant astronomical prices for basic goods. Prices normally inexpensive in the capital were sometimes three or four times the price, exacerbated by the lack of regulation of prices for staple goods. “Your grandfather when he was village captain built the road with other men in the village.”

Until then, no car or bus had entered the village. The road ushered in significant technological and social changes to the village. While it helped improve the lives of Amerindians to some respects, the community remained largely marginalized and suffered from extreme poverty.

I had never had the chance to meet my grandfather. He passed before I had the chance to walk with him and listen to old time stories, or visit the expansive farmlands he had tilled, or hear about how my father had looked to him in his eyes. Yet, despite having passed long, his presence teemed throughout the house he had shared with my great-grandmother, marked in the landscape and place. Over the next few days, she shared with me “spirit stories,” revealing the ways death, the dead, and living intertwined and the past and future informed present understandings of what it meant to be Amerindian. Rather than a strict affinity to a national affiliation of being Warau or Lokono, my great-grandmother’s identity, like others in the village, was understood in relation to village affiliation. She was of/from a specific place. In that identification, there was a whole host of histories, genealogies, and connections to a spatial memory. Specific places were not merely sites of living, but part of a constellation of living histories.

I entered this space as daughter, as confidante, as researcher, as kin, as friend, as guest, as organizer, as outsider in. This work is similarly a constellation of deep wounds and lingering hauntings. It is one brimming with yearning to create perverse futures, pathways that disrupt inherited paradigms of what it means to be Human and what it means to be living with the land. It is in this spirit that I write about the tenuous grounds of colonial legacies of indigenous dispossession, slavery, and indentureship, an endeavor

toward envisioning flourishing roots and decolonial futures.

## Introduction

Guyana rests on the northern shoulder of South America, situated on the conceptual and geographical edges of Latin America and the Caribbean. Geographically located on the South American mainland, the country shares historical, regional, and contemporary movements across modern borders with the neighboring countries of Venezuela, Brazil, and Suriname; it also shares a deep cultural, economic, and political connection with Caribbean countries. Despite a vast hinterland terrain that possesses rich natural resources, including the recent discovery of the largest oil reserve in this hemisphere by US Oil Company, Exxon Mobile, Guyana is one of the poorest countries in the hemisphere, second only after Haiti. In 2012, when I first began my travels to the interior, the differences from the coastal landscape was stark, apparent in the centralization of economic and social resources in the capital, Georgetown, which is located on the coastal strip of built up swamplands.<sup>1</sup> The country was decidedly oriented around a descending hierarchy of “town,” rural villages, and hinterland, often simply referred to as “the bush.” Similarly, resources, knowledges, and governance flowed in a unidirectional flow, inward and never from the hinterland to the coast.

I began my official ethnographic fieldwork in January 2014, working with the Guyanese Organization of Indigenous Peoples (GOIP) as both engaged researcher and member. The non-governmental organization leaned toward a grassroots approach to

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<sup>1</sup> The coastal lands was vast swamps that were developed into colonially ordered plantations and “estates” and later the creation of an intricate grid of irrigation canals and trenches, as the coast is located below sea level and susceptible to flooding.



advocating for indigenous rights. Although centralized in the capital of Georgetown, the organization's leadership and membership spanned across all of the nation's ten administrative regions. The remoteness of the vast interior regions, which in some areas accessible only by airplane, boat, and an arduous and exhausting journey by minibus, contributed to the somewhat fragmented nature of the organization. Communication and the exorbitant costs of travel into the interior often posed great difficulty to organizing membership meetings, and so the organization's annual forum in which all of its dispersed members occurred every two years. My original research sites had focused on Region 1, or Northwest, and Region 9, the Rupununi. Yet, the very real concerns of safety as a female researcher primarily traveling alone in remote hinterland communities resulted in the geographical shift to Region 7, known administratively as the Cuyuni-Mazaruni region. The GOIP organization had stronger political connections with residents in Amerindian villages in the Lower Cuyuni-Mazaruni. Further, this region has been significantly marked by extractive development such as gold and diamond mining, and has seen significant expansion over the past several decades toward the development of the mining sector. Notably, following a highly contentious national election in 2015, the region has been included in a national plan to restructure local governance to decentralize national government. This national policy aims to strengthen democracy and economic and infrastructural development in the hinterland communities. As a result, the mining hub of Bartica was given the status of township, along with several other key centers in the interior.

The stance toward the hinterland as a key economic reservoir for national development was extended with the recently elected A Partnership for National Unity and Alliance for Change (APNU+AFC) coalition government's initiatives to create a "green economy" in 2015, which sought to foster environmentally sustainable economic practices and policies. "Green mining" is a position enthusiastically endorsed by the incoming administration not only to assuage international pressures but also to mitigate the high environmental impacts of mining, most of which directly impact the livelihoods of indigenous communities and their territories. Home to one of only four remaining intact rainforest ecosystems on the planet, Guyana's vast interior is under intense international scrutiny. Guyana's current Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS) seeks to capitalize on development through its long-term agreement with Norway to avoid deforestation and degradation, create low-carbon infrastructure such as hydropower plants, and preserve its natural resources. In exchange for resisting economic forces that favor deforestation, Norway has pledged US\$250 million in payments to Guyana, and US \$80 million for the proposed Amaila hydropower project. On its surface, the LCDS project is a win-win situation. Norway provides investments for Guyana measurable services in mitigating global climate change by avoiding deforestation and Guyana is able to provide development without significantly impacting the land or climate. However, it also raised concerns over whether this agreement is merely a reinscription of unequal, neocolonial relations of power.

Part of the funds derived from Guyana's participation in the LCDS program go towards the land titling of indigenous communities in order to strengthen "land tenure

security and expand their asset base”<sup>2</sup> as a means to enable their development. In 2012, the government began negotiating an agreement with the European Union Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (EU-FLEGT) Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA). The VPA is a bilateral agreement between the EU and the participating country, in this case, Guyana that establishes an export market for timber, with the overall objective of reducing illegal logging by strengthening sustainable and legal forest management and promoting governance. This agreement is expected to enter the implementation stages, with national conversations with various stakeholders that might be impacted by the agreement. Amerindians, as inhabitants of and direct dependents on the rainforest for their livelihood, are considered “stakeholders” of this partnership, being represented through the National Toshias<sup>3</sup> Conference, the executive indigenous governing body, civil society organizations, and the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples Affairs. Given intensive initiatives geared toward the hinterland and its communities to advance policies that foster good governance and generate economic development, the issue of indigenous land rights remains a central question.

Despite state recognition and a series of amendments to the Amerindian Act, indigenous land rights continue to be an axis of contention between the state and indigenous peoples in Guyana. This is not a problem specific to the Guyanese context, as indigenous peoples of the Caribbean islands and mainland territories continue to struggle for land rights. The recognition, constriction, and implementation of indigenous rights are

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<sup>2</sup> Opening address of the National Toshias Conference 2015, an annual convening of indigenous toshaos, or leaders to discuss issues affecting indigenous communities and their land recognition.

<sup>3</sup> Toshias refers to a democratically elected leader of an Amerindian village.

a fundamental issue throughout indigenous territories in the Global North and South. The passage of human rights discourses and international law has conferred limited political purchase for black and indigenous communities in the past three decades. In Guyana, indigenous rights have been recognized in the international community in part due to the organizing of local indigenous organizations, including the Amerindian Peoples Association (APA), one of the strongest in terms of international support and connections, and visibility, the Guyanese Organization of Indigenous Peoples (GOIP), the National Toshias Council (a council of indigenous toshaos or democratically elected village leaders), and the Amerindian Action Movement of Guyana. Historically, there has been a tense relationship between these organizations and the government body the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs, which following the 2015 national elections was renamed the Ministry of Indigenous Affairs. The failure to grant Indigenous Peoples on the mainland right to their territories is directly tied to the conflicts over access to resources on those lands and the coloniality of recognition that informs state-indigenous relations.

## **SETTLER COLONIALISM AND CRITICAL GEOGRAPHY**

The literature on indigenous sovereignty, political recognition and citizenship emphasizes ongoing relationships between indigenous people and their respective settler-states with regard to comparative histories of colonialism (Barker 2011, Byrd 2011; Simpson 2007, 2011); and the various coercive forms of inclusion and exclusion in the politics of liberal recognition premised on the spectre of indigenous authenticity (Klopotek 2011; Bruyneel 2007; Barker 2005; Povinelli 2002). My project expands on this literature

by considering how indigenous subjectivities and struggles for sovereignty occur in tension with autochthonous claims of belonging and political struggles by diasporic, or in this instance Creole, groups, and racialized, gendered forms of governmentality put forth by the state, which place these groups within a particular social order.

I also draw from scholarship on critical geography, in particular feminist theorizing of space and the body, and feminist revisionist approaches to settler colonialism. Such approaches help me to address the main areas of inquiry in this research: the inscription of colonial representations and neoliberal policies on the space of the indigenous body, the production of racialized gendered geographies, and the production of particular political subjectivities in resisting everyday forms of state sanctioned dispossession.

In order to track power relations between the state and indigenous peoples, I focus on the body both as an analytic and a site of power upon which social processes reveal alignments between body, place and nation are inscribed. My use of the terms nation and nationalism is informed by Brackette Williams' (1991) conceptualization. Accordingly, through ideological struggles over national identity the nation acts as a site for reproducing colonial ethnic, racial and gendered categories "aimed to place groups within a single sociocultural and political order ... [that] proposed particular and competing intersections of territorial nationalism and cultural identities" (1991:168). In the case of Guyana, the racial ethnic geography of the state buttresses a national imaginary in favor of Creoles, or descendants of enslaved Africans and Indians, predicated upon displacing indigenous bodies and their connections to land.

Further, I draw on feminist articulations of settler colonialism and geography to

understand the relationship between power, subjectivity, and land. While the literature on settler colonialism highlights settler techniques of native erasure to acquire land as property and to replace them as “new” natives, it does not adequately grapple with the complex power relations constituting black (diasporic) and indigenous relations. This theoretical limitation is reflected in its structural preoccupation with the native/settler binary, in that bounded racial assumptions of the “native” and “settler” as readily knowable or definable is disrupted when we consider indigenous and diasporic claims to land. My approach to understand this relation of power draws from feminist theorizing of settler colonialism (King 2013; Razack 2002) as it provides a more expansive understanding of the production of the settler landscape; that is, it allows for an intersectional analysis of power—mapping the links between conquest, slavery, displacement, heteropatriarchy and colonial legacies that continue to structure the project of nation formation and belonging. Tiffany King (2013) challenges the absent theorizing of blackness in settler colonial frameworks, and demonstrates how the schema and space of the black body becomes white settler property as a “spatial unit” that expands the settler landscape. Thus, settler colonialism is not solely about the acquisition of land through indigenous dispossession but also through turning the black body into a commodity that expands settler space and property. That is, black subjectivities quite literally cannot embody the settler position as the bodily violence enacted upon them situates them outside the realm of humanity without a sovereign capacity (unlike the settler and indigenous subject). Other scholars make similar arguments of the expulsion of the black subject outside the realm of state/civil society (Hartman 1997; Wilderson 2005). Despite analytical challenges, my approach seeks to keep in tension the

realities of historical and contemporary black dispossession in a context where a specific elite stratum of black and East-Indian peoples occupy the seat of state power, simultaneously conferring indigenous rights while rendering them invisible. In particular, this text provides a discussion on the position of blackness and anti-blackness in relation to ongoing indigenous dispossession. In the final conclusion, I engage in greater depth Shona Jackson's (2012) provocative assertions that black ontological being is predicated on extending the settler colonial erasure of indigenous peoples; While attempting to move away from arguments that place the black position as the quintessential oppressed subject and attending to the historical realities that African and Indian nationalist struggle for control of the state reproduced indigenous displacement. I contend that it also points to a misrecognition of the condition of blackness and an inattention to the constitutive antiblackness of the state.

I focus on bodies in space, specifically indigenous bodies, as a critical analytic and locus for analyzing processes of governance, relations of power between the state and indigenous peoples that maintain social orders, and how violence is differentially ascribed on gendered, racialized and sexualized bodies. According to Lefebvre (1992), space entails a dialectical relationship between spaces and bodies, between the material and symbolic, which is not inert, but organic and alive; that is, space is organized in relation to the body and biological needs and social relations. This framework will allow me insight into how indigenous peoples construct their own meaning of "indigenous" through what Low refers to as "embodied space" (Low 2003), in which subjectivities are created through social behaviors and practices and bodily movements across space that make place. If as Foucault

asserts power is spatialized, the body is a “spatial unit of power” (Foucault 1979). Further, a spatial analytic will attend to how indigenous peoples are shaped by and shape territory with far-reaching implications for processes of subject formation, highlighting the ways in which governance operates across and within spaces through social processes and material practices in everyday life (Ingold 2011; Lefebvre 1992; Tuan 1977).

While I share these pivotal theoretical approaches of space, the scholarship of critical feminist geography has critiqued our understanding of space in a more expansive way. As articulated from theoretical work of critical feminist geography (Moss and Al-Hindi 2008; Massey 1994; McDowell 1999), the role of gender and race (McKittrick 2006) is central to the production of space. Informed by a Foucaultian analysis of power, the literature argues that the production of space and place operates through social and spatial processes that situate racialized and gendered bodies within a social order. McDowell (1999) argues that the “body as a place” is inherently a site of relations of power. Although bodies are material and take up space, they demonstrate a mutability that is related to place and position, which provides the groundwork for an understanding of embodied geographies (34). Traditionally geography has focused on the public, to the exclusion of the private, to which the body had been relegated. Women come to be constrained by their bodies, whereas men ascribed the privilege of disembodiment, non-corporeal identities. However, her work demonstrates how the body itself is constructed through public discourse and practices at variety of spatial scales, and how spatial division are affected by and reflected in embodied practiced and lived social relations. These processes come to inflect notions of freedom and resistance (see Hartman 1997; McKittrick 2006), in particular for the



specific forms of gendered, racial violence black and indigenous women experience.

In that sense, if the interior “hinterland” and the Indigenous body are spatial/bodily geographies where the state inscribes social and biological force of power, it is in these spaces of dispossession, loss, and gendered violence that one will find the constitutive elements of Indigenous resistance. A spatial analytic will allow me to access how state discourses (e.g. recognition policies of indigenous peoples) produce hegemonic understandings of where the "authentic" indigenous subject belongs, which indigenous organizations negotiate, contest, and adopt. Rather than approach indigeneity as an already-made conception, I attend to the active processes and “doings” that go into the meaning making, representation, and politics of indigeneity. Thus, indigenous subjectivities are formed “not as an essence, but as a positioning” (Hall 1992) through dialectical processes of movement, placement, and orientation of one’s body within and across land and space. Understanding this dynamic has significant ramifications for whether or not indigeneity as a rights paradigm based on assumed cultural and territorial difference addresses indigenous displacement and subjection.

### **STATE VIOLENCE, GOVERNMENTALITY, AND RESISTANCE**

My approach to study state violence engages in the debate over its conceptualization as a category. While the literature on state violence understands it as a means to deploy power in a destabilized social world (Agamben 2000, 2005; Sluka 2000; Nagensat 1994), some critiques have argued for an theoretical approach that does not frame the state as a

reified entity (Foucault 1978) but as a system of discourse and practices enacted in the quotidian everyday practices and processes through bodily terror and how, conversely, the body emerges as a political site for the negotiation of power and resistance (e.g. Aretxaga 2000 and 2003; Das 2006). Others have argued that while it is critical to challenge the state as the source of power, the presence of the state continues to be present even when it cannot be located (Aretxaga 2000: 399).

Thus, by focusing on the various forms of state processes and practices, my approach stems from a critique of its reified explanations and on how it is reproduced, enacted, and ascribed on the indigenous body and in racialized geographies of interior indigenous territories. My approach on state-violence is inflected by Foucault's works on governmentality and biopolitics (1978, 2003). According to Foucault, the rise of governmentality as a technique of power, of the management of populations, gave rise to biopower as a productive force that centers life as its main goal. That is, this new economy of power focuses on the right to make live and to let die (2003:41). Black feminists have expanded/revisionist analysis of the Foucaultian approach (see also Scary 1985, Feldman 1991, Das 2001; Hartman 1997), demonstrating how bodily violence operates differently for racialized, gendered, sexualized bodies which are inherently marked by the "state of emergency" and state terror as normalized processes of colonialism and modernity. Similarly, Andrea Smith's (2005) analysis of violence against native and indigenous women demonstrates how the treatment of indigenous female bodies as violable is conceptually linked to the degradation and appropriation of land as commodity. That is, sexualized forms of violence are deployed as a tool of patriarchy and colonialism and a

technique of genocide and destruction of people and land. Drawing on these feminist responses, I utilize Foucault's concepts of governmentality and biopower as analytical categories to understand the links between indigenous land dispossession, gendered forms of violence, and neoliberal rationality. Thus, my research attends to how state-violence works to control, maintain, and re-order spatial orders that extend indigenous dispossession and capital accumulation.

More broadly, these bodies of scholarship allows me to examine the question of how governmentalities shape indigenous political subjectivities as what Marjo Lindroth calls "biopolitical collectivities" that works to legitimate the state as the arbitrator of indigenous rights. As arbitrator, the state asserts an exercise of power insofar as it delimits the extent to which indigenous rights, codification, and implementation is carried out. Drawing on the scholarship on neoliberalism and indigenous territorial struggles (e.g. Bryan 2010) and recognition enables an analysis of what is at stake not only in the recognition of indigenous rights, but also how recognition paradoxically is the enabling condition for indigenous marginalization within the Guyanese context, or the coloniality of recognition. That is, the conditions and logics of recognition that are imbedded within and informed by a structure of colonial gendered racial logics that situate indigenous geographies in what I call a space of corporeal-spatial precarity. How do indigenous communities negotiate complex interstices of state power—juridical, legal, and economic—in their struggles for land and against the continuing legacy of dispossession? This dissertation contests the hegemonic assumption that "rights" and "recognition" signals a fundamental change in the relationship between the Guyanese state and its indigenous peoples. Rather, the conferral of rights

should be understood as (re)configuration of colonial power. Recent scholarship on the politics of recognition (Simpson 2014; Coulthard 2014; Povinelli 2012; Barker 2005) has challenged the shifting relationship between state and indigenous peoples from more explicit forms of violence to reconciliation and the increasing recognition of indigenous self-determination on the part of the state and international bodies like the United Nations through international conventions such as the International Labor Organization (ILO) adopted Convention 169 on the rights of indigenous and tribal peoples . Despite its passage in 1989, fewer than two dozen countries have ratified the ILO 169. To date, Guyana is not one of them. In 2007, the UN General Assembly adopted the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). The declaration outlines the rights of indigenous peoples to their traditional lands, cultural preservation, development according to their own interests, and “self-determination.” Even countries like the United States, Australia, and Canada, staunch opponents to these declarations, have become signatories, yet enforcement of the declaration resides as the discretion of individual countries.

Although outright violence against indigenous peoples and their lands persists including, to name but a few, displacements, environmental racism and degradation, and significantly higher rates of gender and sexual violence committed against indigenous women, the embracing of indigenous rights on the part of states might suggest a contradictory stance (e.g. Hale 2004, Lindroth 2014). This reflects the thinking that neoliberal governance necessarily depends on an individualistic economic model, which indigenous demands for collective land rights inherently threatens. However, while the global pressures emerging from the UN on indigenous rights on its member states have

provided pragmatic legal and political leverage to indigenous land claims, “rights claiming and the recognition and codification of indigenous rights take place in a legal framework that has been imposed on the peoples” (Lindroth 2014: 345). As such, this dissertation examines how recognition demonstrates not only a reflection of a reconfiguration of neoliberal governmentality, but also a reflection of the anxieties and desires of the colonial and post-independence governments to manage and delimit the potentially disruptive political subjectivities and demands of indigenous peoples. These demands occupy a space of “excess” that cannot be neatly encapsulated within the script of recognition, revealing the failure of these projects to completely discipline indigenous communities.

This dissertation is also a meditation on the modern state as possessed by its history (also see Taussig 1997), which has produced a nation and national imaginary that in many respects remains captive to white settler legalities, categories, representations, and projections toward indigenous peoples and later, the descendants of enslaved Africans and indentured Indians. This colonial possession as scholars like Frantz Fanon have argued in *Black Skin, White Masks*, has created a “zone of nonbeing” (Fanon 2008: xii), in which interlocking conditions of slavery, colonialism, and indentureship inform the contemporary social and political landscape and relations between Africans and Indians (*Creoles*), and indigenous Amerindians. As scholar Shona Jackson has argued, colonial myths regarding indigenous landscapes have not only engendered indigenous dispossession but also structure nationalist projects of Creole belonging. Creole claims to belonging and struggles over land and resources, however, must be understood within the confines of an inherited white supremacist system. As such, this dissertation brings the Guyanese context to bear

on emerging scholarship that seeks to conceptualize these interlocking systems of oppression, in particular the question of the place of blackness within settler colonial societies. While I agree that Guyana bears the markers of a settler colonial *state*, I problematize the ascriptions of the term settler to adequately describe the position of peoples forcibly displaced from their own indigenous lands.

The dissertation is comprised of four core chapters, which examine these overarching questions in greater depth. Chapter One, “A Country of Sheep Will Always Have Wolves,” examines the racial geography of Guyanese society, which has largely been overdetermined by the memory of political violence between the majority Afro- and Indo-Guyanese population. This bifurcated ethno-political landscape has created what Raymond Williams calls “a structure of feeling” (1977), distinguished by distrust that functions to reinscribe essentializing racial hierarchies. Along these lines, I also argue that the over-determination of ethno-political conflict also prevents a necessary attention to the specificity of blackness in Guyanese society. Further, this social imaginary has situated indigenous peoples as peoples that are readily acknowledged as the “First Peoples,” yet relegated to a liminal space as peoples that cannot be fully known or embraced as Guyanese citizens. This ambivalence is reflected in the state’s positioning of indigenous Peoples as integral to the national memory as cultural subjects, but not political participants, which has effectively served to depoliticize indigenous struggles for land recognition and sovereignty.

Chapter Two, Colonial Regimes of Legality and the Amerindian Act maps the colonial genealogy of the current indigenous recognition policy, the Amerindian Act of 2006, beginning with policies created under Dutch and British colonialism. This chapter

argues that the recognition policy merely extends a condition of coloniality with respects to state-indigenous relations through a restructuring of indigenous governance and a land titling policy that constrain indigenous self-determination and authority against multiple forces that hinder their economic, social, and political livelihoods. In other words, indigenous recognition, rather than a transformation of the colonial violences and paternalism of the past, reinscribes an unequal relation of power that subsumes indigenous rights to “neoliberal rationalities” (Lindroth 2014) and economic expansion, placing them within spaces of corporeal-spatial precarity. That is, recognition facilitates gendered colonial governmentality, rendering indigenous bodies and lands vulnerable to violence and dispossession.

Chapter Three, “Dis is We Land,” demonstrates how land titling processes and the restructuring of indigenous governance through state recognition constrain indigenous self-determination to a liminal space and advance a neoliberal logic that shapes indigenous peoples as “partner subjects to neoliberal governmentality,” even as it reveals how this space is also contested, reproduced, and disrupted (Odysseos 2010: 343). Second, it reveals how spatial acts constitute the naturalization of social orders that position the hinterland as a redemptive space<sup>1</sup> for national development as a testing ground for contradictory state-sponsored initiatives that seek to advance a “green economy,” while simultaneously expanding extractive industries, like mining and logging. This chapter also demonstrates the need to rethink (dis)possession beyond the overt techniques of state violence toward indigenous peoples, that often highlight how the state extends itself through processes of territory-making (Bryan 2012), but also but how dispossession functions as structuring

force in the quotidian spaces of life, over and along the contours of the body. Thus, this chapter calls for the need to consider how the precarity of the land is fundamentally a question tied to the precarity of the body, as landandbody and not a land/body distinction in terms of Eurocentric conceptualizations of land. Dispossession for indigenous peoples not only constitutes loss of land as is often the primary analytic, but the loss of land/body/spirit, or indigenous livelihoods, hindering what indigenous scholar Gladys Tzul Tzul (2016) refers to as “the reproduction of life.”

Chapter Four, “(Dis)remembering the Dead: ‘Buck’ and ‘Black’ Women and Gendered Colonial Violence” examines how representation of the female body, in particular the indigenous “buck” woman, operate in tandem with territorial dispossession. While regimes of legalities enable the state sanctioned dispossession of indigenous lands, representations of the racial-sexual body that occupy that space also engender bodily forms of violence. Further, this chapter theorizes the gender and sexual violence indigenous women experience in relation to the broader heteropatriarchal violence Afro- and Indo-Creole women experience as interlocking forms of domination related to colonial relations of power. It also grapples with the specificity of violence enacted on bodies of black and Amerindian women as part of a larger colonial structure of gendered dispossession. The differentiated and specific violence indigenous and Creole women experience, and the state’s response to redressing this violence, I argue, also reflect their respective positionality in relation to the state and its national imperatives of neoliberal development.

The Conclusion, “Looking for Free, Envisioning Decolonial Futures,” brings together the core thread of “corporeal-spatial precarity” with a discussion of the limitations



of settler colonialism as a framework for grappling with the tensions and contradictions of slavery, indentureship, and indigenous dispossession in the Guyanese context. From an intersectional analysis of the black and indigenous woman, I argue for the need to read plantation and conquest as mutually constitutive sites of gendered dispossession in Guyana. Along these lines, I argue for the need to attend to the historical social formations of antiblackness, anti-indigeneity, and white supremacy as orientating forces that continue to shape the contemporary Guyanese landscape. From this contested, muddled terrain, we may begin to envision spaces of decolonization.

#### **CALLING THE BODY HOME: THE SPIRITUAL IS POLITICAL AND OTHER METHODOLOGICAL MEDITATIONS**

My conceptualization of what it means to be indigenous is inextricably and intimately tied up with blackness; not merely an embodied expression of merging kinship relations as a black and indigenous woman, but perhaps more importantly, as the convergence of political projects portrayed as antithetical and only interconnected at the historical site of conquest, slavery, and genocide. These entangled projects of modernity structure the contemporary world, and continue to shape our political horizons of resistance. Beyond a shared history of subjection to European colonizers, black and indigenous communities share intersectional spaces of maroonage. While there have been fugitive spaces where black and indigenous peoples came together to resist their colonial masters, there is also a corresponding past (and contemporary) reality of how colonial notions of freedom, influenced by the way the state confers legitimacy in the form of liberal discourses of rights and recognition, have become internalized and reproduced in our relations within and

between one another.

My body is not a fixed bridge between black and indigenous worlds, in which I equally straddle both coasts. It is a bridge that is weathered, and off kilter; some of the ropes that suspend the bridge are threadbare with wooden planks shattered, and some even missing. It is partial and incomplete. The black and indigenous body is no less susceptible to a consciousness that may reinscribe heteropatriarchal colonial violence; this body is not exempt from those forms of relations that adhere to extractivist or colonial understandings of the land and its property regimes. However, my bodily experiences have brought me to a situated knowledge that recognizes how our political projects may also reproduce white supremacy, indigenous erasures, and anti-blackness. As such, this text is not only a reflection of the lived realities of those subjected to ongoing (neo)colonial power and heteropatriarchal violence, but also the means by which I negotiated the contradictions of these overlapping spaces—of being allied with indigenous struggles while realizing my black skin signaled other forms of racialized gendered violence(s) as an “activist” researcher.<sup>4</sup> Of navigating political spaces traditional viewed and occupied as the purview of men. As the political landscape reflected heteropatriarchal and inherently gendered norms, it was not uncommon to be perceived as “out of place,” or interrupting a naturalized schema. This is not an anomaly, as women have often been constructed as occupying the

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<sup>4</sup> By “activist research methods,” I am referring to particular intellectual genealogy of politically engaged research as defined by the Austin School Manifesto (2007), Gordon (1991) and Hale (2001; 2006; 2008), Speed 2008, that destabilize notions of “neutrality” and “objectivity” in the epistemological and methodological underpinnings of fieldwork and a more general framework of politically engaged, feminist, decolonial approach to anthropology (e.g. Craven and Davis 2013; Harrison 1991).

margins, and not the center of convoluted ideologies and images about the nation.

Methodologically, this meant that many of my interlocutors consisted of men. This was also true of the indigenous organizations with which I worked and much of the interlocutors I engaged in numerous villages. While leadership positions continue to be occupied by men, this is being disrupted by the increasing involvement of women in the political sphere; in particular the women-led organization of the Amerindian Peoples Association (APA). Moreover, the perceptions of me—as a young single woman without children shaped the scope of engagement with differentially positioned interlocutors. Thus, this work, as all research, is partial, constructed, and contingent on my shifting positionality as tenuous insider and outsider. As such, my aim is not to construct a monolithic depiction of indigenous struggles or to conflate the very real differences within and between indigenous groups and their relation to the state. The relations between coastal Arawak and Carib communities and those influenced by a history of Brazilian exchanges in the Southern Rupununi and an overt policy of integration to constrain the perceived threat of succession have yielded unique differences. Yet, this work does not necessarily hinge on aggregating those differences. Rather, it is an analysis of the structural relations of power and how that has played out in the lived experiences of indigenous peoples in particular communities.

Further, the theoretical and conceptual work of pulling together seemingly disparate forms of oppression—anti-blackness and land dispossession—were paramount for illustrating the ways “the afterlife of slavery” is tied up with indigenous dispossession, and the desire to bring myself back into the landscape. Where was I in the here and there, as a

diasporic subject born in the North, yet also rooted to the South? When my black ancestors were brought to the coastal shores of colonial America in chains and my indigenous ancestors fled into the “bushes” of Guyana, stripped from their lands and beaten back? When their mother tongues were lost to the winds, or forced into a co-dependent relationship with English, where was I? To whom did I belong to?

Thus, I conjure a notion of the self that is intimately related to healing and the inherent healing properties of water. Black feminists have turned to the waters as an archive of memory. This archive is a milieu of pain and healing, of the dismembered bodies at the bottom of the sea, and a point of rupture and continuity of the past, present, and future. As Jacqui Alexander writes in her beautiful meditation on spiritual praxis in *Pedagogies of Crossing*, water is embedded within and imbued with memory: “Emotional memory. Bodily memory. Sacred Memory” (2005: 290). Drawing on what anthropologist Kale Fajardo (2005)<sup>5</sup> calls “crosscurrents,” Omise’eke Tinsley (re)imagines the Atlantic as a confluence of the “enslaved and African, brutality and desire, genocide and resistance” (2008:192). As Fajardo describes, these transoceanic crosscurrents also points to the potential for transforming the self.

Oceans and seas are important sites for differently situated people. Indigenous Peoples, fisherpeople, seafarers, sailors, tourists, workers, and athletes. Oceans and seas are sites of inequality and exploitation—resource extraction, pollution, militarization, atomic testing, and genocide. At the same time, oceans and seas are sites of beauty and pleasure—solitude, sensuality, desire, and resistance. Oceanic and maritime realms are also spaces of transnational and diasporic communities,

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<sup>5</sup> Kale Fajardo, *Filipino Cross Currents: Histories of Filipino Seafaring—Asia and the Americas* (Address, University of Minnesota, Twin Cities, February 14, 2005)

heterogeneous trajectories of globalizations, and other racial, gender, class, and sexual formations.

In these “queer black Atlantic oceanographies,” water is both metaphor and history for the “unstable confluence of race, nationality, sexuality, and gender” (2008: 191). Simultaneously, the Atlantic waters are a site of commodification of black flesh and resistance, and a confluence of blackness and queerness at the site of the slave ship. Water is foregrounded within the (queer) imaginary of the Atlantic, not as the backdrop against the collision of the “old” and the “new” worlds—of conquest, genocide, and slavery— but also as the opaque medium through which reclamation occurs. Water also functions as a way to call oneself home to a spiritual and bodily place that cannot be accessed through colonial narratives of histories, archives.

Water, as physical element and intangible properties of the spiritual, lies at the intersections of flesh and the materiality of water, itself a living vessel teeming with beings that allow for a pedagogy of embodied healing. Through the communion with the river, I came to understand the convergence and collision of the selves, of intersecting horizons of death—of black and indigenous loss— of movement across space and time, a calling of the self home. It also meant a re-possession of the self. Written before, during, and after ethnographic fieldwork, I deploy embodied poetry, not only to illustrate how my body became the filtration through which I processed the dialogic process of trauma, renewal, and healing that structured the continuities between what I experienced as life as fieldwork, but also how I processed the traumas and violence of those who I came to know. More concretely, embodied spiritual praxis helped me navigate the quotidian gender violence,

the marginalization of indigeneity, and the prevailing anti-blackness that permeates across categories of difference in relation to enduring white settler logics that shape the social and political landscape.

Healing, and the water as a medium of healing for the pained body, was a process of interruption and unlearning, and a coalescence of different knowledges; those that rose up from conditions of the flesh and those epistemologies based in impermanence and change in continuity. Beyond merely being an additional coping mechanism for navigating the interstices of power relations embedded in fieldwork, spiritual praxis as an embodied methodology, in which the body is centered, listened to, and (re)imagined as the shores upon which I returned to night after night, became a compass from which I directed my fieldwork. This had embodied implications for me as a US-born researcher and how I negotiated my positionality as a dark-skinned black and indigenous identified woman entering into a racial matrix of power that ascribed value and meaning to phenotypical characteristics as a way of “passing.” Conversely, I was read as dougla<sup>6</sup> or buffy ana, which were terms that carried distinct sexual undercurrents related to the idea of transgressive “taboo” sexual relations respectively between African and Indians and Africans and Amerindians, part of the colonial impetus for maintaining divisions between a majority non-white population. Attached to these particular “mixed” categories was also the notion of hypersexuality and lasciviousness. As one Amerindian man assured me, it was common

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<sup>6</sup> Dougla is a racial derogatory term that roughly translates to “mutt” or “bastard,” with its origins in Bojpuri, the Indian dialect spoken by the majority of indentured Indians laborers that migrated in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The term as it was used in North India, had a connotation of racial impurity given the orthodox Hinduism view of relationships across caste as illegitimate.

knowledge that buffyana women naturally embodied a “high nature.” With a serious expression, he explained that it resided in the very mixture of her African and Amerindian “blood.” That is, she had an excessive sexual appetite that only a “real man” with an equally high nature knew how to handle, namely African and Amerindian men. Along these lines, I was rendered vulnerable in particular ways that my status as researcher or “foreigner” did not mitigate. Presenting myself to the water was also a means of seeking redress for the sexual assault I experienced at the height of my fieldwork.

The epigraphs/poems/creative expressions that I present throughout the dissertation attest to the centrality of the body, its need for healing, and how readings of the/my body and its imbrications within village life, spaces of the state, and “coastlander and hinterland ontologies,” facilitated and defined the methodological limitations of my research project. This points to how the pained body speaks, but also how processes of healing occurred in relation to the land, the rivers, and the intimacy of living and *being* with others. This praxis needed to be adapted several times depending on the geographical space, my relation to the land and its peoples, and the ebbs and flows of my own capacity to provide healing and redress for myself. In particular, an embodied spiritual praxis as a form of embodied redress is profoundly political. As Audre Lorde suggests in her analysis of the power of the erotic, the erotic not only created a space of transformative power, it held the possibilities for transcending difference and building coalitional politics. In order to engage the research I set out to do, which stemmed from a profoundly personal and political place and demanded an embodied listening and witnessing to violence, spiritual praxis was integral to me as an engaged researcher. In order to engage with community, with differentially positioned

collectivities and hierarchies and the trauma of bearing witness to and carrying the stories of others wounds, I had to take profound care of self. I had to call my self home. Again and again and again.

### **LUNAR PRAYER AT THE RIVER**

For the several months that I lived in the Lower Cuyuni-Mazaruni region, I adopted the practice of presenting myself to the Cuyuni River and cleansing myself. Performed alone and in the darkness, I ventured to the boat stelling, when the moon waxed at varying moments of fullness. Sometimes in complete darkness, during the new moon, I would sit in quiet contemplation by the river. On occasion I could make out the silhouette of a canoe, so silent I wouldn't realize the moving object was flowing against the current of the river. I would think how perfectly it and the being inside blended with the black water. Only the light of the moon threw the shadows into contrast, imagined shapes thrown into shadowed clarity where conjecture and memory of the landscape converged to a guess.

The only time I avoided going to the river was during my period. My grandmother had sternly advised me not to bathe by the river as the water spirits might take me and she warned me to be careful of *kanaima*.<sup>7</sup> I wisely heeded her warning. According to her, because we had Arawak (Lokono) ancestry, the enmity between particular tribes— primarily coastal and more hinterland geographical differences — continued to the present moment and had its roots in the “pre-discovery” wars that occurred between the

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<sup>7</sup> Kanaimà roughly translated is a form of sorcery performed on the body over the course of several days, resulting in the painful death of the targeted victim. While some describe kanaimà as an evil spirit, they are flesh and blood people and are otherwise known as dark shamans.



predominantly coastal Arawak and the more interior located peoples, such as the Macushi, Patamona, Wai Wai, etc. Imbricated within this history was overlapped by racialized notions of more civilized Amerindians and those perceived as more authentically adhering to their customs and traditions, though kanaima could come from any one of the nine nations. I accepted her warnings without interrogating the plausibility of her statements, or denying their veracity. It simply was. “Dem is water people,” my grandmother told me one day, prior to my departure into the “bush.” She was speaking about a family member who had succumbed to spiritual possession after being in the coastal village of Beterverwagting for several days. The water spirits sought her return, by force if necessary, and had possessed her body in order to compel her return home. Near the waters, near the river. Dem is water people. Because I did not belong to those rivers, the water did not know me in the same way. I needed to be cautious with how I moved.

When the river was “washing,” that is, during the rising tide of the river, alternatively affected by whether it was during rainy or dry season or the effects of the moon is when I first presented myself to the river. The moon was at peak the first night, and I waited until the family slowly trickled inside. The generator had given out around ten, petering out with a violent shake inside the shack on the top of the hill, the gas finished. The eldest daughter swung in the hammock tied between the posts of the zinc-covered dock. I could see the gentle glow of her cell phone, as the cell phone signal was strongest near the water. After a few more moments of waiting, she jumped out of the hammock. It folded in on itself, swaying in the cool night air. She smiled at me shyly on her way inside.

With my yellow bucket in hand, filled with soap, a tattered washcloth, I threw my

towel over my shoulder and walked across the long steeling that extended out from the bank of the hill, the posts anchored deep into the ground and further out, into the mud. The water had risen higher than I had seen in the past days, within feet of the top of the walkway. At minimum, the water had risen five feet in the past few hours. As it was toward the end of rainy season in July, I could hear the current strong around the curve of the hill. Hidden from sight, jagged rocks, some taller than me, had become submerged by the water. Where the water hit the rocks, it created mini- whirlpools, a small rapid where the water swirled and gurgled. If you did not know the river, the current would easily pull you in. Even the strongest boatmen took some time to make it around the curve before continuing into calmer water. Directly across from the house was the village island, a speed boat ride across of no more than two or three minutes, depending on the weight in the boat and the power of the engine. On the island resided the main built structures that serviced the entire community, the nursery and primary school and modest teacher's quarters, the health post, and an incomplete guesthouse on the left side of the island. On the other side of the island, the policing captain/village council member lived with his wife and son. He had two other children, a daughter living overseas and a son, who worked and lived outside the village. They owned a small shop that sold sweets of all kinds, biscuits, and cold sodas in highlighter colors to eager schoolchildren throughout the day. At night, it became a spot where boatmen, miners and loggers, might stop to lime, though it remained a fairly small number of patrons. By dugout canoe, as I had often see schoolchildren stop at the house to collect the youngest daughter, after seeing her standing at the steeling waving a large white T-shirt to grab their attention, the boat ride to the island took about ten minutes.

Between the island and the opposing hill, where our house was nestled, massive rocks rested in the middle of the river. At low tide, the black rocks loomed, imposing and immobile. They had been here before the community had settled here.

From my vantage point on the hill, I had direct line of sight to the island. Except for an imperceptible shape in the water, the rocks had all but disappeared. Unlike the surrounding water, the light barely reflected off of the top of the rocks, indistinguishable to those familiar with the river dared traverse the water at night. I was often amazed at how villagers navigated the waters in the darkest of night, navigating the channels like an old road, steering around rocks, miniature islands, and sandbars. Their familiarity with the landscape came from memory but also how the water shifted, its behaviors and dangers, the road that connected them to other parts of the village and with nearby villages.

There was a steady wind, and though the wooden railing blocked a portion of it, I knew it would only get colder once the water came in contact with my skin. I leaned over and dumped my bucket into the river and placed in on the first step of the stelling. Furtively, I glanced around to check for a passing canoe or speedboat, although the darkness and the darkness of my skin guaranteed that any passerby would only see my silhouetted figure. I stripped off my clothes and placed them on the rail carefully, so they wouldn't fall into the water. I scrubbed myself with the washrag, until a thick layer of soap coated my skin, until sticky white streaks chilled on my skin. I shivered at the first drops of water I poured over myself from the cup I had grabbed in the kitchen. I dipped the cup inside the bucket, collected water and poured it over, repeatedly until my skin was clear of soap.

Though smoky from the cloudiness of the water, a combination of mud, sand, and

other microscopic fragments, my skin felt clean. Sitting on the bottom step, the water lapping gently at my feet, I let the wind dry my skin. Shivering, I carefully unwrapped my sage from its paper wrapping. After several attempts, and eventually turning to use my body to block the wind, my sage caught fire, smoke wafting into the air, a red glow hovering in the air. Waving the sage first under my feet and over my hands, under my arms, down my legs, around my neck and finally guiding the smoke over my face and into my lungs, I began to pray. I do not know how long I prayed for. I prayed for stillness, for the spirit to guide my tongue and ensure I spoke with care, integrity. I prayed that I listened more than I spoke. I prayed for my heart to heal. I prayed for good relations with the family that had invited me into their home. I prayed for guidance, because I had no clarity of this work. I prayed for my families in Beterverwagting and overseas in the States. I prayed that I could withstand the loneliness and that perhaps in the midst of that I could make friends, I could share parts of myself and come to some partial understanding that could be of use to the community that had invited me live among them. Over and over until I sensed the thoughts collapsing into one another, until it a feeling of intention permeated my body. Until my skin began to tingle, until I felt my spirit shifting within me, gradually until it caught my conscious mind and submerged it. Pulled it down and out of the way. The waters did not speak to me the first night I presented myself. Until one day they did.

## *Surrender*

In the gentle breeze  
I heard the Spirit  
Whisper surrender your pain

Surrender  
Let go to the waters  
Peel off that burning skin and sunken eyes  
Into black waters that  
Purify yours

That part of you given, gifted and bestowed  
That which can never be taken  
Refracted refractions that reach  
Deep down, in the deep  
Vibrating and carried away  
On the down beat

Surrender  
She commanded  
Come naked to the waters  
And allow that which is in you to  
Affirm life

Just as time and stories  
Come and go  
Returns on itself kernels of truth  
Like the stars look back on themselves  
Surrender, in the deep  
In the dark with me

She found us in the deep, in the dark  
Warrior Woman  
Awaiting the moment when the soil was rich  
From the blood of our ancestors  
To birth the next generation of life  
To spring forth from the bottom of the well  
To incarnate and reincarnate  
She found us at our lowest  
In the deep, in the dark  
When we had chased other options  
When we stopped, exhausted

And,  
She sensed the precise moment to emerge  
A culmination of our ancestral violet rage  
Coalesced hauntings and dreams  
At this place we meet  
In the crossroads, next to the sheep  
This is the moment we longed for and lingered over  
Of truth telling and unmasked cesspools of devouring  
Emptiness and hollowed out husks  
Of flesh

The flashpoint  
The critical mass  
The zombies and living dead  
And the living and waking  
The orishas and deities  
The witches and conjurers  
The priestesses and warriors  
The sages and crones  
The fresh gaze, the first gazes  
Of children, yet old  
Of birthing and painful beginnings  
that feel like endings

She chose this moment,  
When the veil is lifted/lifting  
Captive gazes that cannot look away  
She is reaping what she sows  
And we are the seeds in maturation  
Warrior Women and Men  
Light bearers and trumpet players  
Sword wielders and strategists

The night has come, and with it  
those of us  
who have bared down the dark, the moon-children  
The crescent wearers, the wanders  
Those that run with wolves  
Those that dance in the fields  
Those that commune with the land

I see you

I hold you  
I am yours  
You are mine  
We belong to each other  
In the darkest blue  
In the richest hue  
Be still, cause she k(new)  
Be still, in the deep  
In the soil of flourishing roots

## **Chapter One: A Country of Sheep Will Always Have Wolves**

I met Allan by pure chance, during one of my daily excursions to the internet café. It was one of the few places in the capital city of Georgetown where I could access free internet and retreat into a relatively quiet atmosphere. I would venture to the cafe, ironically called Oasis, on the days when I needed to write field notes and later, as an established place of meeting for interviews I had scheduled with participants from workshops or roundtables. The cafe was located north of the city center, tucked away from the frenetic energy of the bus park and the blaring of horns of chaotic drivers sliding through stop signs and warning oncoming traffic they had no intention of coming to a full stop.

Palm trees framed the side of the cafe, conjuring the aesthetic of paradise springing up from a concrete landscape. A simple front entrance and tinted windows prevented onlookers from gazing into its interior. The busiest hours of day were lunchtime and early afternoon. It soon became apparent that it was a favorite spot for government officials and personnel from various international funding agencies or lecturers, as well as students from the University of Guyana. There was a clear division of class, marked not only by the business-like attire of its patrons but also in the exorbitant prices of the food and drinks, where simple pine tarts and roti were three times the prices of street vendors and small shops. There were the usual regulars, and during the weekends it was bustling with families, white foreign volunteers, and the occasional group of young Guyanese clicks.

Allan worked on the street next to the cafe, and I would pass with a wave before continuing on my way, until one day he gestured to me from underneath the red tent with



two-bench length tables covered with freshly made pineapple and chicken pizza. He shuffled the small donut sized flour balls floating in the small griddle tucked in the corner, gently bubbling oil hissing as he dumped a new batch. When I politely refused the *phoulourie*, he insisted I try the pizza, to which I ruefully agreed. He placed what he called “two of the best slices of pizza” into a small white lunch bag, and handed me a plastic sandwich bag filled with a lightly tinted brown fluid, a lemon drink known as *swank*, “on the house.” I perched on the only available chair, the afternoon sun incrementally creeping underneath the tent’s protection from the brutal sun. Sweating, I watched him attend to the line of people that had suddenly appeared, boys and girls in their school uniforms, white and green. They were his primary base of patrons, he told me. The location of his business, directly across from a secondary school ensured a steady stream of customers, and his culinary skills and agreeable prices ensured their loyalty.

After he had tended to the last customer, he swiped his hand across his once white apron, adjusted his hat, and asked me, “What’s your deal?” I laughed at his bluntness, and asked him to clarify, to which he responded how he saw me heading to the cafe frequently, a “woman on a mission.” I nodded, and explained to him that it was one of the few places I found I could do work in the city. Prompted, I told him I was a student studying in the States, and that I lived now with family in BV (Beterverwagting). Assured that I wasn’t “some fancy person,” he seemed interested in learning more about my research and even invited me to interview him. We *gyaffed*<sup>8</sup> about how he and his brother, a man standing nearby with his arms crossed and an amused expression on his face, ran this food business.

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<sup>8</sup> To “gyaff” is to talk, engage in informal, long-ranging conversations.

The house was right though the gate behind them he said, pointing to a Spiderman cardboard cutout on the porch. It was easy to transport the baked pizza and other food like chow mien without worrying about it cooling down.

“We open everyday, even Saturday, late late,” he said. He pointed to the nearby cathedral further down the street, cars barely coming to a stop before crossing the intersection, a staccato dance of hesitation and advancing, blaring horns, cars just barely tolerating the traffic signs. “That’s when the freaks come out,” he stated plainly, referring to the sex workers, “prostitutes and gays” that solicited drivers that zoomed around the cathedral.

It became a common occurrence for me to meet with Allan, each time I ventured to the cafe, or further up the road to the promenade gardens, a park located on a portion of what was once known as the Parade Ground, a site overlaid with the history of the 1823 East Coast Rebellion, where slaves convicted of the Rebellion were hanged. Allan frequently complained about the structure and layout of the city, warning me never to walk through Tiger’s Bay, one of the most neglected parts of the city, a ghetto lining the coastal edge and on the margins of the city. Many residents who lived there were seen as “criminals,” stigmatized for the abject poverty in which they lived. Located on the margins of the heart of Georgetown and its business district, Tiger Bay, for Allan reflected the larger issue of poverty and neglect, conditions of numerous communities; conditions he attributed to political corruption and the focus of government officials, and the “elite” to garner wealth for themselves. The level of neglect was countrywide, he explained, and could be reflected in the disrepair of the city, such as the massive flooding that occurred in sections

of the city.

He pointed in the distance, indicating the parallel street behind the crest of the national library, asking me if I'd seen how Main Street flooded when the rains came. The network of canals, pumps, and small sluices, called kokers, were built to form a drainage system of some 140 miles that ran throughout the city, along the narrow plain of the country's Atlantic coast. The coastal plain's inland border comprises these canals that form a geographic border from interior swamps, which measures only about 10 miles at its widest point, before ascending into the white sandy hills of the interior. Enslaved Africans who dug thousands of pounds of swamplands, built the system of canals during the 18<sup>th</sup> century under Dutch colonial rule. Without fail, portions of the city became inundated with water, becoming impassible for public transportation and pedestrians. It wasn't uncommon to see people slushing through water in knee high rubber boots, the trench clogged with floating trash and overgrown weeds preventing the accumulating rain water from flowing off the street and paved sidewalks.

During rainy season, I avoided traveling into town without sneakers or boots and an umbrella. During my time on the coast, traveling between the village outskirts and Georgetown, I attended numerous workshops and meetings, by the invitation of the head of the Guyanese Organization of Indigenous (GOIP). These meetings ranged from "capacity building" workshops for indigenous communities to stakeholder consultations on proposed development and policy initiatives slated toward strengthening governance and economic development in the hinterland. I had established a relationship with the organization several years ago during my preliminary research and in the past several years

had become a member in addition to my collaborating with the organization in their support of indigenous advocacy and organizing against Amerindian<sup>9</sup> marginalization.

When I explained to Allan that soon I would be leaving to spend time in the hinterland, he looked at me sideways and rhetorically asked, “So you gone bush?” He told me about his experience working in the “bush” with his brother on several occasions. But because life as a miner was hard, he decided to begin another life as a venture cook. His sister and her husband owned a restaurant in Kitty, and he hoped to be able to open his own restaurant as well. It was a popular place that patrons went to for lunch during the day and at night met with a group of friends for drinks. His mother lived overseas in the States, along with several of his other siblings. She had become sick with cancer, and he was waiting for his visa to be approved in order to travel and visit her. He told me in the next several weeks he expected to be able to visit her. The migration of thousands of Guyanese during the authoritarian regime of President Forbes Burnham had established a vibrant diasporic community in Brooklyn, New York. Known as the “brain drain,” thousands of visas for the US had been granted in the past decade alone.

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<sup>9</sup> The term Amerindian is a colonial term that obscures distinctions between indigenous nations in Guyana. It is widely used in local context, often interchangeably with “Indigenous” and “First Peoples.” However, it, along with the nine indigenous nations model, elides the transnational dimensions of Amerindian social and political relationships across the fixed geographical boundaries of the modern Guyanese nation-state, e.g. economic and cultural exchanges across geographic borders in Makushi and Wapishana communities on the Guyana-Brazil border, for example. This chapter does not necessarily depend on disaggregating those differences. For further critique of the commonly accepted nine-tribes model in Guyana, see Hornborg & Hill 2011. Further the communities with whom I conducted research reflect how territorial ascriptions do not necessarily align with distinct indigenous groups, though there are regions with more defined ethnic presence i.e. Akawaio in the upper Mazaruni, etc. For example, in this ethnographic context, several indigenous groups lived within one particular village, in part from migration from other regions in search of economic livelihood and intermarriage across ethnic affiliations.

Alan had a rather descriptive critique of the political system in Guyana, which he compared to “wolves” and “sheep.” The upcoming May elections loomed closer, and there was a heightened tension in the city. I commented on it to him one day. He nodded, his apron streaked with oil stains and his hat perched high on his head, barely blocking the light from the setting sun, which streamed underneath the red tent.

“Business is getting slow, and soon you won’t see anybody in town.” He shrugged. “Usually on the day of elections people avoid coming to town, and most of the businesses will close up.”

Puzzled, I asked him whether it might be due to the elections being considered a national holiday.

He chuckled. “No, people still work and dem thing, its just people [be]come frightened to in the city during the day.” He told me that many people, in particular East Indian peoples were afraid that violence would break out, regardless of who won the elections. Though many had the sense that if the presiding Peoples Progressive Party (PPP) party remained in power for another term, the supporters of the incumbent party—the newly formed A Partnership for National Unity and Alliance for Change (APNU + AFC) multiracial coalition—then violence was unavoidable. As many observers and conversations that I heard on the minibus, the upcoming elections had all of the markers of the calm before the storm.

He described what he considered the political vitriol of the incumbent elections as a process that shaped racial tensions in Guyana, and specifically as it related to African and Indian Guyanese, which he argued uncritically consumed much of the pandering and

promises of development the politicians leveraged to secure their vote and support. The mobilization of a racialized political memory that constructed opposing narrative of African or Indian dominance of apparatuses of the state deepened racial cleavages. Politics in this country, he explained, played out along the lines of racial loyalty, in which the presiding PPP became associated with Indo-Guyanese, and the PNC was historically seen as a black party. He seemed dismissive of the idea that either party in reality worked for the best interest of the working class and poor in Guyana. He paused as he served some schoolchildren *poughlourie*, fried balls of dough customarily lathered with sour, or spicy pickled mango sauce.

He wiped his hands again, and stood upright, his right hand moving in time with his words, an embodiment of his conviction: “Listen, a country of sheep will always have wolves. So we can’t be sheep.” He shrugged his shoulders and turned back to his next customers.

Within Allan’s description of the political landscape in Guyanese social and political life can also be found an indictment of corruption, and the erasure of the clear class distinctions underlining the discourse of development and progress for all Guyanese. This chapter examines the racially bifurcated political landscape in which a historical memory of racial violence and ethnic distrust that emerged following independence in 1966 (in part due to the US intervention) has engendered a “winner-takes-all” approach to politics. Embedded within political discourses and rhetoric of perpetual violence and irreconciliation between these groups are colonial formations that reveal anxiety around the reproduction of national sovereignty. Within the public political imagination, the

current political governments and their conflicts over the pathway forward for the nation involved a wrestling with the colonial hauntings of its living past —considered to be structured between the legacies of colonialism, indentureship and slavery, and its positioning of Black and African descendants. The legacies of colonialism, and the presiding racial and gender logics that underpin these processes continue to exist and shape the contemporary political memory. I observed this interplay during my attendance of several political rallies, of both the presiding PPP government and the incumbent coalition APNU + AFC opposition. What interested me about the circulating discourses were the racial anxieties that structured a framework into which particular groups were situated as naturally belonging, to borrow from anthropologist Brackette Williams (1991), as “takers” and “givers”.

Further, Allan’s analogy of wolves and sheep also provides an entry point to think about how rhetoric of the “good life,” though ostensibly about securing economic and social mobility for Guyanese citizens, masks how apparatuses of the state have been wielded in the service of an elite stratum of Africans and Indians. It also articulated paradoxically, how attempts to construct a unified nationalism reinscribed a social hierarchy that positioned indigenous peoples as peripheral, apolitical subjects of the “bush,” effectively depoliticizing historical and contemporary indigenous struggles against social and political marginalization and the erosion of indigenous territories. In the following section, I examine how, to borrow from Raymond Williams, a “structure of feeling” of distrust continues to underpin the relationship between the coast and its

predominantly Creole<sup>10</sup> inhabitants, simply known as “coastlanders,” and the hinterland or “bush,” and its majority Amerindian population.

### **PEOPLE WE DON'T REALLY KNOW**

I had met Shawn, a self-identified Afro-Guyanese man during several workshops on government accountability months before the 2015 National Elections. He was a well-known community leader and human rights activist that steadfastly advocated for inter-ethnic solidarity and a new political landscape that did not perpetuate what he referred to as “imaginaries” around each racial/ethnic group. He had agreed to meet with me to share his understandings of Guyanese politics and its reawakened racial anxieties that had been stoked through political race baiting and rigorous campaigning by the People’s Progressive Party and the newly created coalition party, A Partnership for National Unity (APNU)(formerly known as the People’s National Congress) and Alliance for Change (AFC). With deep lines etched on his broad forehead, he began our conversation without any prompting on my end. “We have not been able to form this true Guyanese identity as the motto has been defined, ‘One Nation, One People, One Destiny.’” The motto in many ways had become an aspirational haunting for post-independence Guyana, a reminder of its democratic immaturity.

“It’s still a creed that we yearn to achieve because the politics got in the way. The

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<sup>10</sup> The term Creole refers to the ninety percent of the Guyanese population, primarily descendants of enslaved Africans and indentured Indian labor forces as distinct from any of the indigenous groups in Guyana. Yet the term itself obfuscates the ethnic differentiation created under British colonialism that remains paramount in Guyanese society.



cultural differences didn't really get in the way—even though the East Indians had they own culture, Africans had they own culture, the people *dealt* with one another, people lived with one another some intermarried.” He chuckled. This could be readily apparent in the spatial landscape, such that Indian and African villages were separated by the boundaries of dirt roads and trenches. A mere twenty feet from my own family's house lot, separated by a clogged an irrigation canal was the beginning of another, predominantly “Indian” village.

He noted that while independence had shifted the course of country through nationalist rejection of British colonial ideologies and sensibilities, it was tempered with a internalized hyperconsciousness of what it meant to claim a specific cultural identity, particularly for African descendants. “You have the indigenous people maintain their way of life, *their* culture, *their* religion. East Indians the same thing. But the Africans decided he was going to be living like Europeans,” he told me as he shook his head. His lamenting of the seeming lack of cultural retention by the African community had been a common sentiment expressed to me over the past months that more broadly connected to a shared sense of black dispossession.

As another well-known organizer and criticizer of the current Indo-Guyanese led government pointed out that under the PPP government, there had been significant black marginalization. “There is a dispossession of black dispossession,” He told me gravely. While this sentiment of black dispossession as a historical construction connected to ethno-political fomented fears that Indian control of the state apparatus meant a loss of redress through the institutions and resources of the state for black people, it also revealed the

(im)possibility of attending to the specificity of blackness, which had become reduced to the domain of ethno-political conflict.

Perhaps not wanting to reproduce the narrative of perpetual divisiveness by discussing race, he paused and then slowly elaborated on his previous comment regarding the black subject, specifically images surrounding the black male of criminality and threatening sexual prowess. “You got this colonial teachings, *black man, black man, black man*, and that was driven in, in order to separate the people...So when you have all of this slave revolts, there was no Indians involved. They came as indentured, so they didn’t have to fight to be free, they became free after the contract expired...still on the plantation but *free*. And then things some people did reinforced the lie.”

“We were marginalized, and so you got this distrust on the side, where they say ‘these guys get back in power we gonna struggle even more.’”

“On which side?” I ask.

“The Indians,” he clarifies. “If the Indians get back in power black people felt they would continue to be marginalized. So, the Indian don’t trust us cause they think we gonna rape all they daughters, take away all they money, rob them, take they jewelry.” His voice rose as he became more impassioned, and I noticed an Indian-looking woman at a nearby table glance back over her shoulder. He notices her sudden attention to our conversation, and noticeably lowers his voice. “And the blacks feel like ‘OK, you get them, you put them back in power, we suffer. We can’t get jobs. We are marginalized. So that *distrust* is still there, but beyond that, beneath that there is a yearning for a better way.”

“What about Amerindian peoples? What is the relationship with them and ‘coastlanders?’” I asked, as I drank my own tea.

“Coastlanders think people in the hinterland are primarily ‘backward.’ Because they still refer to that area as the ‘bush.’ You don’t hear a guy first say he going Arranca or Mahdia. First he say he gone bush. And forever it is referred to as the bush.” Connected to this image of the bush as an underdeveloped and wild space, were also representations of Amerindians as extensions of land itself—backward and unaffected by the stream of civilization. “And you still hear these stories about Amerindians about how they turn into animals...transform themselves into animals. If this is true, I don’t see anything wrong with it. But you see you have these stories. So you see, *trust*...Everybody acknowledges them as the First Peoples, yes, but they remain uneducated, they remain outside of the mainstream.” What further situated indigenous peoples outside of the mainstream was their seemingly radical difference from coastlander modes of being, but also the erasure of their struggles as political subjects, a disconnect that not only reinscribed their position on the bottom of the racial hierarchy as docile, child-like subjects, but was also mobilized by political parties to secure political loyalty.

“While they lands are supposed to be preserved from them, different government are breaking these treaties and these agreements. Because again they are using the leaders of the indigenous people. They go there and offer them all kind of money and gifts, that’s why the PPP’s gets a lot of votes...So, coastlanders see them, yes, as brothers, but not brothers that *they know*. And you can’t trust them, because first of all they all voting PPP regardless of what; they stupid. Because they see these people give them gifts, and they

vote for them. And no proper respect is given to them as a group. Now individuals will come out, get educated, and get respect. But even those individuals look down on they own people, because they are part of the politicians that go in and trick them. These individuals are selling out they own people.” He sighed. “There is no serious attempt...there is no uproar about this in the larger society on the coastlander. Because the coastlander for the large part do not know the people, except for the guys that go in to work the gold. You would hear people say they would link with Brazilians and Venezuelans over black men in the bush. So, that really is where the indigenous people stand, they don’t trust coastlanders. There’s feeling that they don’t even think they are true Guyanese, they have no loyalty as long as they get they land and get they way. That is the feeling.”

He pointed out that though the Guyanese population barely registered a million, there was not land pressure in that regards but as the availability of lands on the coastland would soon become scarcer and scarcer due to the expansion of coastal development. The hinterland was perceived as the final frontier of national development. Referring to proposed hinterland development he ponders aloud, “But how will it be developed, will they exploit the people? What is the way that they want to develop that will preserve they way of life not to impose *our* way of life?” His questions reflect the larger conundrum in which Guyana finds itself as one of the poorest countries in the hemisphere entangled in the crosshairs of colonial legacies and imperial interests: determining whether or not the country’s path forward will reproduce and project these very exploitative power relations toward it’s indigenous peoples.

## **DAVID, MOSES, AND THE RACIAL GOLIATH**

On May 25, 2015 former President Bharrat Jagdeo appeared before the magistrate court for the private criminal charge of inciting racial divisiveness. The charge stemmed from his much publicized and controversial comments at the remembrance ceremony for the late presidents Cheddi Jagan and Janet Jagan at Babu John, Corentyne on March 8. The sweeping coverage of his remarks prompted social and political commentaries and news coverage, in which many lambasted the former president for promoting racial/ethnic hatred and divisiveness in violation of Guyana's electoral laws outlined in The Representation of the People Act (The Elections Act). To a crowd of PPP supporters, Jagdeo declared that the opposition 'consistently shout about the racism of the PPP but they practice racism. They whisper campaigns...' But it was his following remarks that provoked the swift condemnation from civil society organizations and international dignitaries, later prompting the Ethnic Relations Commission (ERC) to publicly admonish his statements as setting a dangerous precedent for the elections. His comments came during a moment of heightened racial and ethnic tension, namely between the predominantly Indo-Guyanese Peoples Progressive Party (PPP) and the incumbent APNU + AFC coalition party:

The PNC has just chosen as their presidential candidate a man who was very active in that era, the era of oppression, the era of starving our people, and I say this because they have gone backwards, they have gone backwards to choose someone who is characterized by repression, who has blood on his hands, because the people in Berbice, just here, the people who were killed protecting ballot boxes, protecting democracy, were killed in full knowledge of people like Granger and others who controlled the political directions of the country at the time...So they're counting on poor memories and they're counting on the lack of knowledge on the part of young people to bring these white elephants, behemoths, the fossils of the past back in the

political arena, and I hope that you will as I ask you, make sure that people are educated about that past...

Specifically, many interpreted the remarks as symptomatic of the moral state of the nation and the living memory of racial violence that erupted during the pre-independence period of 1962-1964, which has simply become known as “the disturbance period” in Guyanese history. There was a combination of geopolitical and national events that hindered the granting of independence, namely: the civil disturbances in the country, which resulted in the deaths of nearly 200 people of mainly of African and Indian ancestry; the inability of the three core political parties to collectively determine a date for independence from the British colonial administration and an independence constitution; and, the United States government concerns with the popular PPP’s communist leaning and the threat of communist expansion represented by the influence of Cuba. Against the backdrop of the Cold War, the US expressed its fears of the establishment of Marxist-oriented government in the mainland of South America. The well-documented intervention of the US and the CIA in the disturbance period demonstrated the US government’s intense fear of the spread of communism (Rabe 2005). The US government became intensely interested in the political landscape of British Guiana after the formation of the PPP in 1950 under Cheddi Jagan, a communist-oriented political party and was staunchly opposed to the idea that the PPP would take political control proceeding independence. The anti-capitalist, anti-colonial class-based party had the staunch support of majority of the colony’s black and Indian working class, which together comprised nearly 90 percent of the population. US concerns grew after the Cuban revolution in 1959 and its emergence as a Marxist state

under the leadership of Fidel Castro. Ultimately, these events coalesced to result in the delay of granting independence.

In 1955, there was a split within the PPP between Forbes Burnham and Cheddi Jagan, the primary leaders of the party. This split stemmed from a difference in ideological perspectives and the US/Britain's desire for a more moderate leader that aligned with their economic and political interests. Jagan was a resolute supporter of a socialist path and Burnham believed that the geopolitical conditions of that period necessitated a more moderate approach. Forbes Burnham went on to form the People's National Congress (PNC) in 1958, and participated in its first elections under that name in 1961. This ideological and political split also reflected the beginning of a deeply embedded political-ethnic cleavage, such that the PPP became seen as a predominantly Indo-Guyanese political party and the PNC an Afro-Guyanese base. With the initial support of the United States and Britain, the PNC government would go on to lead a near three-decades long political rule, amidst allegations of electoral rigging, corruption, mobilization of the police force and state bodies in the service of the government.

Following the sudden death of Forbes Burnham in 1986, the subsequent president and former minister of economic development, Desmond Hoyte, there was a marked shift toward reorganizing the country's economy that aligned with neoliberal economic agenda of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. This period heralded the end of anti-capitalist nationalism and foreshadowed the beginning of neoliberal development expansion "that protect capital against social and political disruptions" (Hintzen 2004: 122).

The national elections of 1992, heavily scrutinized by European, Canadian, Caribbean, Commonwealth, and American observers, resulted in the PPP's return to power, and was widely viewed as a return to democracy. The PPP would lead for the next twenty-three years, until the 2015 national elections.<sup>11</sup> As Hintzen eloquently argues, the actual relinquishing of the colonial state by Britain did not change the naturalized racial order that enabled colonial control, but rather “retain what Goldberg identifies as the ‘governmental technologies’ of colonialism” (Goldberg 2002: 9, cited in Hintzen 2004: 107). Thus, the surfacing of “heterogeneous claims,” of contested political terrain between African and Indian dominated political parties, is seen as a demonstration of the inability of the formerly colonized to rule itself and legitimates the necessity for Northern tutelage and intervention<sup>12</sup>. This rhetoric of chaos and disorder was not only instrumental in the US interest in observing the 2015 national elections, but had become internalized and deployed by each respective political party to assert their claims to political rule.

In anticipation of the May 2015 elections, political rallies were being held across the country from the capital of Georgetown and in stronghold villages in the rural communities and the hinterland. Thousands of supporters showed up to support the continuation of the PPP-led government, with rallies of the newly created coalition APNU+AFC political party calling forth equally exuberant support from Guyanese that wholeheartedly believed in the

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<sup>11</sup> This brief historiography of Guyana is not meant to imply that ethno-political cleavages began at the tumultuous period of independence. Rather, it signals a continuation of the after-effects of colonialism and powerful imperial forces that implemented fragmentation of the working class along political, social and ethnic lines. For a brilliant historiography of social upheaval that characterized Guyanese society after emancipation, see Walter Rodney's, *A History of the Guyanese Working People, 1881-1905* (1981).

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, 107.



need for a change captured in the APNU+AFC coalition slogan, 'IT IS TIME!' The posters that decorated Georgetown displayed a smiling David Granger and Moses Nagamootoo, the running mates for the national elections. David Granger of APNU was the candidate for president, with Moses Nagamootoo of the AFC, previously of the governing PPP, as the candidate for prime minister. Together, these self-identified Afro-Guyanese and Indo-Guyanese candidates hoped to disrupt the PPP/C governing hold as well as the ethnic divide that had defined the country's political scene for over a half century.

I decided to attend several upcoming political rallies in order to gain a sense of not only the political rhetoric but in many respects, the national psyche. Understanding the psyche of the nation in many respects represented a core component to comprehending *where* indigenous geographies and politics were situated within this contested political domain, and to what extent politics *delimited* the possibilities for indigenous self-determination. To what extent were indigenous peoples seen as participatory citizens in the development of the nation and its self-conscious desires for national unity, healing, and economic progress.

It was not difficult to attend any of the rallies, though I was anxious about being seen as a supporter of either the ruling party or the opposition by any of the civil society organizations I worked with. I feared that they would interpret my presence as acquiescence to the oftentimes incendiary remarks that were made about specific racial/ethnic groups, which often drew on a national memory of racial tensions and stereotypical representations. Most commonly mobilized was the specter of black criminality that veiled a more structural sentiment of antiblackness expressed across all

racial/ethnic groups in Guyanese society. The political landscape largely reflected the presumption that Georgetown and surrounding villages *was* Guyana and the political front lines in which ideological and political support hinged on securing votes. For the PPP, this meant strategically targeting specific race/class laborers seen as the PPP stronghold: Indian rice and sugar workers. Part of the PPP platform included promises to strengthen the failing rice and sugar industries. On the other side of the political divide, the coalition APNU-AFC mobilized a multiracial optics that would appeal not only to its constituency of Afro-Guyanese voters, but also to encourage Indian laborers to recognize a seeming false consciousness of what they considered the bankrupt political vision of the PPP party. This worked in line with efforts to persuade indigenous communities, historically seen as the crucial “swing vote” population, that an APNU-AFC “unity government” would ensure that land tenure would be resolved in the incoming administration.

The lexicon of racial anxiety was apparent during a PPP rally that I attended in mid-April, weeks out from the national elections. I had been invited rather spontaneously by one of my friends, Erica, who worked as a reporter for one of the premier newspapers in Guyana, *Kaitaur News*. She was frequently assigned with covering numerous APNU-AFC coalition and PPP political rallies. I had informed her of my research, and she would often invite me to attend different events. One Sunday afternoon, I received a call to attend a PPP rally on the east coast of the Berbice-Corentyne. She, along with two other reporters, had been tasked with covering the rally, and writing the story. The turnaround was extremely tight, with a newspaper article crafted by midnight. I agreed, eager for the opportunity to travel to one of the rallies with someone familiar with the environment and more

experienced with the political scene.

We left in the afternoon, traveling along the coast for nearly an hour. We passed the iconic “Dutch man” tree, an imposing tree that appeared to spring up from the cement. Erica explained to me that rather than risk disturbing the Dutch man *jumbee*, or a malevolent entity, that lay buried underneath, the road had been built around it. We passed the names of villages that bore legacies of Dutch and later, British colonialism. Sarah. Zealand. Good Faith. Adventure. As we traveled, I noticed large factories in the distance and the amounts of huge bundles in brown jute bags on the side of the road. I pointed to another pile of bags, as we sped on the sparsely populated road and asked Erica what the bags were. She nodded and told me that much of the rice paddies were excess, and that farmers had not been able to secure payment. This was in part due to the restriction of markets and the declining price for rice paddy.

The slowing of the vehicle and the milling crowds of people in red and white shirts that proudly proclaimed PPP support signaled our arrival. Because the car could not move further through the crowd, we decided to park the vehicle alongside the trench and make our way on foot. The bass of the music from nearby cars hit my ears as soon as I opened my car door. Smiling faces passed me and we easily melded in, flowing almost as one cohesive group toward the roaring crowd further down the road. Dimly, I heard an impassioned voice shout: “Let’s keep jobs for the sugar workers....and the rice workers!” We came upon a tall bronze Indian man holding a plastic cup, standing with a group of other men leaning against a parked vehicle. “Meh jus realize meh is ah coolie bai [boy]... me neva shame meh is ah coolie bai” a voice croons from the stereo system. The popular

song “coolie bai dance” had broken out on the music scene, and had quickly become a national favorite. The song reimagined the term “coolie” from its historical meaning as a slur and derogatory term for indentured laborers that had traveled from India and other locations. It was a proclamation of pride and the beauty that struggle had forged.

Erica stopped the car. “Uncle, let me get a picture please.” She pointed to the words emblazoned across his shirt. “I AM SUGAR STRONG.”

“They selling the sugar thing up here,” She told me wryly, after quickly snapping a picture of the grinning man. It was 20 minutes before we could reach the core of the crowd. We gently wound through the milling people, steadily approaching the stage. In the midst of laughter and side conversations, others stood in serious contemplation, in rapt attention to the speakers on the stage. Directly across from the stage draped in striped red, black, and white yellow fabric was another elevated stage. Reporters and cameramen adjusted their equipment, lanyards draped around their necks as they held recorders and furiously jotted down notes. There was barely any space on the stage, but somehow Erica was able to wrangle a spot on the corner of the stage. The crowd was massive and primarily made up of people of Indian descent and a sprinkling of Afro-Guyanese and dougla-looking people (racially mixed people of mainly African and Indian heritage). The crowd overflowed the designated area, with people precariously perched on the zinc roof of a nearby home and seated on the hill above the trench that cut vertically alongside the stage.

“Do not let the dark ages take you over! I know your memory serves you well!” From the stage, I could make out the former President Bharrat Jagdeo. Dressed in a red button-down shirt, his spectacles reflected the increasing stage lights as the evening dark

descended. “Cheddi Jagan would say you should come out and vote for PPP!” The crowd roared in approval at the invocation of one of the founding leaders of the political party and the twenty-eight year regime of PNC leader Forbes Burnham simply referred to as the “dark ages.” His speech concluded and the crowd began to chant, “Granger is a danger! Granger is a danger!”

Erica looked at me and murmured that they were actively inciting fear in the people. I scanned the ground, the base emanating from the huge platform speakers. I could feel the fervor in the cavity of my chest. Attendees flapped white flags and T-shirts in the air. I noticed a little girl perched on the broad shoulders of a man. Other children played around the legs of the adults, and the smell of food from nearby vendors taking advantage of the inevitably hungry attendees. My attention returned to the stage.

“The people of Berbice understand more than any other...who gave two sons who were murdered to defend the right to vote. Berbicians were made criminals for eating food of their choice!” The speaker was referring to the 1973 shooting and killing of two PPP supporters in Berbice after the close of polling in the elections of that year, which happened during Forbes Burnham’s governance. The other comment referred to the period during which Burnham banned the importation of foreign products he believed could be grown on Guyanese soil, primarily flour.

Referring to coalition candidates Moses Nagamootoo and Khemraj Ramjattan, the speaker assured the audience that they had sold their “political souls,” for betraying their Indian brothers and sisters. This rhetoric reinforced what scholar-activist David Hinds has referred to as the “nimekaran phenomenon”— of an anti-Indianness as the political

platform of the opposition coalition. He urges the crowd, “Even if their souls are up for sale, yours is not!” Although the coalition promises a change, he states, the AFC party of the coalition will not equal the power of APNU, which he said was just a reincarnation of the PNC regime. “What will happen to the 16,000 sugar workers?” He reminds them that the PPP government has always held the interests of rice farmers and sugar workers as paramount to the nation’s economic development. “Onward with progress, ...we will never go back to the dark ages of PNC rule!” Waving his fist in the air, he proclaims, “Place your X near the cup on elections day!!” He concludes, as the crowd wildly waves their flags. The party song bursts forth from the speakers, signaling the conclusion of his speech. “What’s in my cup stays in my cup...” The crowd sings along, as another prominent official, Clement Rohee, takes to the podium to affirm that the direction of the party is one of forward thinking. This election poses the important lesson to never be complacent and never return to the past.

“We want to warn them [the coalition party] that the plans they are hatching to derail the PPP...we want to warn them not to hijack any ballot boxes! If they do that comrades...”He pauses dramatically, allowing the cries of the crowd to continue before continuing.

“If they do that comrades, big trouble is ahead of them!” Indignant faces in the crowd vehemently shook their heads at his words.

“You don’t change clean clothes for *dutty* [dirty] clothes. These people are caught in a time warp...this party can *never ever* move away from the principles on which it is built.” The speech swiftly changed its tone to insinuate that the running mates for the

APNU+AFC coalition was an inappropriate marriage in contrast to the PPP running mates of the current president of Guyana Donald Ramatour, up for re-election, and Elisabeth Harper, a political newcomer that had served as the Director-General of Guyana's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. She was the first woman to be nominated for Prime Minister in the nation's history.

Referring to the Granger-Nagamootoo running mates, Rohee asks the audience, "One man put a ring upon another man hand...?" He rhetorically asks the gathering whether or not a ring was supposed to go on another *woman's* hand. The crowd collectively booed and laughed. Erica whispered in my ear, "What the 'ras is this man saying?" I felt uneasy as he continued his analogy. He cited a well known calypso song in which a husband goes upstairs to the bedroom in order to have sexual relations with his female partner, presumably his wife. Instead, he substitutes the names of the coalition candidates in the song.

"Who gone get 'pon [on] top and when they get on top what they gone do!" He thrust his hands into the air, gesturing with each word. To my left, I overhear a man shout "Dem batey men!" The term "batey is a derogatory reference for homosexual and queer persons. Some people standing nearby shook their heads, laughing aloud.

"The song says let the wicked burn in flames!" The party's anthem begins again. The deployment of homophobic rhetoric to critique the coalition government was not entirely surprising to me, as the queer subject has been projected as a subject that is alien to the nation-building project. Scholar Jacqui Alexander has illustrated this point in her analysis of how the nation configures itself as heterosexual (2005: 21-65). Though writing about

the context of the Bahamas, it is salient to the Guyanese context, in particular how the sodomite body (imagined as foreign and racialized as white European and hypersexualized and imagined in tandem with the prostitute body and lesbian body) function as “the state-constructed imperative to circumscribe boundaries around the body politic (making it safe for imperialism), or establishing quarantine within it (making it safe for loyal heterosexual citizens). Not only did the insinuation of a queer relationship and corrupted masculinity point to notions of heterosexual disloyalty, it also marks a strategic reinscription of heteropatriarchy, which paradoxically attempted to subvert the historical patriarchy of the state, in which the participation of women has been marginalized or entirely erased. The historical nomination of the PPP candidate, Elizabeth Harper for prime minister, became ironically deployed as an extension of that heteropatriarchal power. Thus, her nomination, rather than a threatening interruption to the heteropatriarchal primacy was constrained and cast as the natural progression of the nation-state and heterosexual citizenship.

Soon, former President Jagdeo took to the podium again. “PPP family, we have walked a long road. When we resume elections, we will resume development.” Referring to candidate Moses Nagamootoo again, he states, “He’s selling our struggle, our blood for a prime ministerial candidacy!” He reminds the audience of the PNC militarization of the elections in which the army was used to carry out elections fraud, picking up ballot boxes. “Who will protect you?!” He advised them to go into the villages to vote, “because the future of the country...of freedom is at stake!” He urged the women in the audience to encourage “their men” not to frequent the rum shop the night before elections day, so as



not to impair their judgment.

Finally, the candidate for Prime Minister, Elizabeth Harper was introduced and took to the stage. Her speech mirrored the previous rhetoric of the PPP “family” as a party dedicated to the interests of the Indian community. “Not once did the party flinch, since coming into power in 1992.” Unlike the other speeches, she focuses a considerable amount of time on the youth “to stay in Guyana to help develop Guyana” and women.

“Women have a vital role in development. This is crucial as domestic violence continues to be an issue to eradicate.” Rather than a direct challenge to the patriarchal structures that have enabled the prevalence of domestic and sexual violence, the economic development of women is framed as the solution for the mitigating unequal relations of power.

Despite the perception of the APNU-AFC coalition as a messianic historical moment that would presumably deliver the nation from corruption and racial turmoil, the coalition also reflected the marginalization of women’s role in political participation in developing the nation. In its initial release of the APNU+AFC coalition’s list of candidates for Nomination Day, the coalition came under immediate public scrutiny for its embarrassing omission of the constitutional requirement that one-third of the candidates be women. Although the party quickly moved to correct the list in order to be cleared by the Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM), the damage had already been done, raising public concern about the party’s commitment to women, given its campaign emphasis as being an advocate of women’s rights. While the PPP government quickly mobilized around the “party’s oversight,” it demonstrates how the women’s issues had become for both political

parties a platform on which they hoped to secure women's full support as well as how the marginalization of women reflected an embedded structural colonial heteropatriarchy, which Alexander argues highlights how neocolonial structures persist in the current social order: "heteropatriarchy is useful in continuing to perpetuate a colonial inheritance...and in enabling the political and economic processes of recolonization" (2005: 24).

Thus, what is understood as merely a political struggle over the state apparatus between dominant Africans and Indians may also be perceived as a struggle over the projected image of the national body. The invocation of historical wounds of elections past and the threat of corruption of the body politic reinvigorated intense fears of the death knell of participatory democracy. This was not only apparent in the PPP's invocation of the martyrdom of the ballot box murders committed in Berbice and the insinuation that Granger's blood-stained hands bore the marking of that period, but also in the APNU+AFC coalitions' position that this election was the moment for emancipation from a 23-year reign of corruption.

The coalition suggested that the death of well-known activist and antigovernment demonstrator Courtney Crum-Ewing, recognized for his one-man protest for 80 days outside a well-known government officials' office, revealed the government's corruption and the propensity for PPP violence against potential dissenters. Much like the "Ballot Box Martyrs" in 1973, the coalition similarly pointed to the death of Crum-Ewing, who was shot dead one late evening with three bullets to the head as indicative of the nation's peril under the presiding government. One image of his infamous bullhorn bore the words "Only the ballot can stop the bullet." Granger referred to him as a martyr at his funeral. "He knew

the risk he was taking to oppose the oligarchs,” the candidate stated solemnly to the mass of attendees. “He bled to death for democracy.” The crowd began to chant the candidate’s names: David! Moses! As one villager assured me, the names of the candidates were not coincidental. David and Moses, two messianic leaders that would deliver the country led astray by its false leaders in dogged pursuit of elitist economic self-interests.

### **SHIFTING POWER, ETHNIC INSECURITY AND NATIONAL RECONCILIATION**

On May 26, following the contentious and closely monitored elections by numerous international observers, with a delegation from the Jimmy Carter Center led by former U.S. President Jimmy Carter, the elections were declared free and fair. The inauguration of the elected APNU-AFC coalition government at the renovated National Stadium proceeded despite overcast clouds and the imminent threat of downpours. Located near the Cuffy Statue, the stadium was filled to capacity. People of all racial and ethnic backgrounds clamored for a glimpse of former brigadier and newly appointed President David Granger. Drones flew overhead broadcasting the historic event for those unable to attend the inauguration, with panoramic views of the massive crowd that overflowed the stadium’s capacity and spilled into Independence Avenue. Despite the overwhelmingly cramped corners, smiling faces eagerly stood for several hours leading up to the ceremony. Equally bright were the bright colors of the cultural exhibition and performances of several groups representative of the different Guyanese ethnic groups and the colors of the Golden Arrowhead of the national flag: red, gold, black, and green and white. Reiterating the campaign’s vision that had resulted in its election, President Granger affirmed the nation’s

ensuing path toward reconciliation, healing, and unity. However, many indigenous leaders complained that the cultural exhibition leaned heavily toward Afro-Guyanese nationalism, with minimal representation of any of the indigenous groups. Instead of unity, it gestured toward the continuing marginalization of indigenous peoples. The only difference was the change in political control of the government.

In the ensuing weeks and months following the elections, the APNU+AFC coalition began the task of realizing its governmental promises outlined in its 100 Days Plan. Ambitious in its scope, the plan stated 21 promises, which included increased salary for public servants and old age pension; implementation of a phased VAT reduction (consumer tax of certain goods and services), lowering the bridge toll for the Berbice Bridge, the establishment of an investigative commission on corruption, the adoption of a sustainable economic plan put forth in the initiative to build a “green economy” and the implementation of the Anti-Money Laundering and Countering the Financing of Terrorism Act. Included in the laundry list of initiatives was the overarching concern of securing the nation against the threat of a reinvigorated simmering territorial dispute with the neighboring country of Venezuela, which had renewed its claims to nearly two thirds of Guyanese territory to the internal threat of ethnic insecurity. That is, the perceived instability wrought by political conflicts between majority African and Indian groups. Securing the nation’s borders and fostering inter-ethnic unity was fundamentally related to the nation’s sovereignty and development. As I will argue in the final section on the discussion of Amerindian sacrifice, national redemption also hinged on extenuating indigenous sovereignty and rights.

On September 3, 2015, Guyana’s newly elected A Partnership for National Unity and the Alliance For Change (APNU-AFC) coalition government convened a public forum with attendees from all sectors: distinguished government and state officials, civil society, non-governmental organizations, and international dignitaries. The government’s anxiety over ensuring unity became apparent at the Social Cohesion Roundtable, a roundtable event aimed at facilitating a national dialogue on reconciling a fractured society. I had learned about the roundtable from one of the local papers. Though similar to many others, there was uncertainty about what social cohesion meant. The head of the indigenous organization, the Guyanese Organization of Indigenous Peoples (GOIP), had also encouraged me to attend. He mentioned that along with members that lived in or near town, he expected that members from another indigenous organization it supported and occasionally collaborated with over the years would also be in attendance—the Amerindian Peoples Association (APA). Though these organizations had a tense relationship with the previous administration, they approached this new administration with hopeful trepidation that the new political moment might also be an opportunity for government support of indigenous issues and the marginalization of the hinterland. The presumption was that the “unity train” of the new administration was an open call for all Guyanese citizens to equally participate, including Amerindians.

The roundtable was slated to be held in the state-of-the-art Guyana International Conference Centre (GICC), newly renamed the Arthur Chung Center, after the brief presidency of the nation’s first ethnically Chinese President, Arthur Chung. He was elected the country’s first President of Guyana when the country became a Republic under the

leadership of Forbes Burnham in 1970. The center was located on the “village road” which had previously been a railroad that ran through the rural sugar plantations. Contemporary villages had been mapped onto these former plantations, visible markers of imposed colonial divisions, in which narrow trenches often separated Indian and African villages. Constructed by the Government of the People’s Republic of China, the centre was funded by a grant provided by the Chinese government at approximately US \$8M. The conference was located near the village of Sophia, primarily a black community at the edges of Georgetown, and lightning rod for the eruption of political fears and suspicions the night election polls closed on May 11. Rumors had begun to swirl when a minibus driver alleged that ballot boxes were being delivered to the local PPP elections headquarters, which also served as the Indo-Guyanese church and pastor’s home. Under the two decades of the PPP government, many of the residents felt the community had been severely neglected and attested to the government’s prioritizing development for their Indian counterparts. Often subject to flooding from rains, the roads that are paved are riddled with treacherous holes; maneuvering through the streets has become an obstacle course; the trenches overflow with garbage and many residents must secure drinking water from standpipes on street corners. Residents and single mothers from Georgetown’s impoverished population had settled on the abandoned cane fields, establishing a squatter’s settlement. Though the then PPP government had allowed them to secure legal land title, residents complained that their basic needs continued to be unmet and the conditions enabled the spread of crime.

Though the team of opposition leaders that arrived at the scene to investigate found no evidence of illegal polling, the irate crowd refused to disperse, surrounding the pastor’s

home and calling for him to appear before the crowd. Although police had descended to quell the crowd, by the end of the night eight cars had been burned, charred metal bones still smoking in the early morning hours on the next day. It was fitting then that a national dialogue on social cohesion would soon be underway just down the road. Ironically, while the roundtable was portrayed as a discussion that cut across racial difference, it did not extend to the inclusion of the masses of peoples beyond dignitaries, government officials, and leaders from various civil society organizations. There was a clear class difference in its attendees and participants. New reports later revealed that PPP leaders, now the opposition party, along with its supporters had staged a protest outside of the conference center. They refused to acknowledge that the APNU+AFC coalition had legitimately won the elections fairly, and demanded a recount of all cast ballots despite international observers that had deemed it a “free and fair election.”

The roundtable began with opening prayers, observing all of the major religious faiths represented in the country: Muslim, Christian, and Hindu. Filled to capacity, the murmuring conversations in the amphitheater conference room fell to a hush as the lights darkened and warm yellow light filled its center; the sound of drums echoed and reverberated staccato rhythms. Several dancers descended the stairs to the makeshift stage, green skirts twirling and assembling into a seated circle. A woman pursued the set of dancers, her fiery red skirt flaring around her body, undulating with purposeful steps to the beat. A seemingly disembodied voice pierced the darkness, narrating the story of the emergence of the Earth: ‘...and then came the children of the sun, strong like the drum. And the children walked across the land to every corner of the Earth... and they were one.’ The

drums momentarily quieted, the dancers lithe movements emulating the softened rhythm as the narrator continued: ‘They went from place to place, and gave the lands they wandered many names. But the Earth was one and *they were one*.’<sup>13</sup>

Over time, these ‘children’ dispersed across the lands, losing contact with each other:

They changed and forgot that they had brothers and sisters all across the Earth, so that when they saw each other again, they thought they were strangers and they fought with each other and enslaved one another and tried to hurt one another. And some of them found a beautiful land, filled with waters, with rivers, with creeks, with waterfalls and rapids. The land of many waters...*Guyana*.

A male dancer in flowing white pants mirrored the female dancer’s arabesque motions, until he, alone, remained:

And through times they fought with each other because they had forgotten they were one. But one of their own remembered, and sacrificed himself so that they could *all* remember. He was named Kaie, and his legend lives on in the name of the falls over which he went, the *beautiful* and *majestic* Kaieteur.

The narrator states to the audience, “Columbus’ doom affected us all.” But the voice tempers the deterministic edge of the narrative for the contemporary Guyanese society, “They will come to realize they have the same aspirations. The bounty of this land is for all to share, *their* land.” While the showcase demonstrated dancers representing each segment of the population, beginning with Afro-Guyanese and Indian performances and ending with an Amerindian man’s performance, it centered on the lingering wounds of divisive racial violence between dominant African and Indian groups, or *Creoles*.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Original emphasis



Notably, this violence is reconciled through indigenous sacrifice in the figure of Kaie. The showcase segues into another exhibition, continuing the theme of unity and reconciliation in the form of a light-hearted conversation between an African and Indian man—in Guyanese *Creolese*—who through the realization that of their shared cultural markers around food, music, and love for homeland are able to embrace their distinct differences. At its conclusion, the lights brighten overhead, and for the first time I am able to get a clear image of the packed audience and a glance at the schedule reveals a full schedule of speeches from various international bodies and Ministers and officials from the current administration.

The event moderator takes to the podium to congratulate the Guyanese citizenry of taking the initial steps toward expressing Article 10 of the constitution: an inclusionary democracy that signaled the nation’s “moral regeneration.”

“We are using a fresh approach to make a good life for everyone. The process we are about to embark on does not detract from our distinct constituencies.” In fact, through a collaborative process the government sought to develop a national strategy that would include as many “stakeholders” as possible. He advised the audience that this would be a delicate balance. “Guyana is a product of many streams of history...we must build one national identity.” Yet, extreme poverty, homelessness, and landlessness posed numerous challenges to this objective as fast as the new administration may desire, he cautioned. This would be the ultimate aim of the newly created Ministry of Social Cohesion he told us. Over the course of the administration’s five-year term, the institution would reach out to present civil society organizations, private organizations, including faith-based

organizations and cultural groups. “Social cohesion is a two-way process...and will go a long way toward reconciliation,” he assured us. In addition to this public outreach, the Ministry would build and maintain existing historic sites and monuments around the country, as they would contribute not only to a national identity and “inclusive history,” but also to cultural tourism that would attract domestic and international travel to its pristine hinterland.

Drawing comparisons to the reconciliation process that occurred following the apartheid regime in South Africa, the following speaker, the resident coordinator from the UNDP applauded attendees for conducting a roundtable to begin the process of social cohesion. She calmly recited Nelson Mandela, “*the healing process involves the nation because it is the nation itself that need to be redeemed*” (added emphasis). The notion of social cohesion, she continued, enabled the capacity building of societies and not merely sub-groups. “No society is fully cohesive,” pointing to the number of nations in crisis globally. Pointing to the Council of Europe, she reminded us that cohesion is an ideal that needed to be approached as a constantly shifting equilibrium achieved through the changes of government and shifts in economics. Peering down at her address, she congratulates the audience for successfully holding non-violent elections, as “this means democracy in this country is maturing.” This statement echoed the idea that democracy in “under-development countries” merely mimicked a mature and fully functioning democracy in the colonial metropole and imperial powers of Europe, the United States, and Canada. Strengthening this blossoming democracy demanded the “indispensable” participation of the significant amount of Guyanese living in the diaspora, primarily those in high positions

and the younger Guyanese generation to obtain those positions left vacant. “You need them back,” She urged the audience.

British High Commissioner H.E. James G. Quinn followed suit in his definition of social cohesion couched in economic terms. “A cohesive society fights exclusion and marginalization, creates belonging...and offers all upward mobility.” Comparing the tumultuous relationships of the United Kingdom, between Britain and Ireland, he reiterated the importance of all citizens’ participation in social cohesion. Accordingly, cohesion should be approached through long-term initiatives, strong leadership, and local participation. “Only when all sides come together to work with the government.” He concludes by thanking the government for its efforts. “The government of England is here to help.” The irony of the statement, that the former British colonizers would now extend its hand in governmental support was not lost on me, or the subsequent speaker—the former Commonwealth Secretary General Sir Shridath Ramphal. The emerging multiracial society overcoming the separatism of the past he tells the gathering is a promising development. While many may believe “that racial division is worse...it is not.” He recalls how Guyanese social groups and clubs were identifiably divided based on race and acknowledges that while the current initiative to build a stronger society is commendable, social cohesion is not a new need or perception, pointing to his role in shaping the 1951 constitutional reforms and the creation of the nation’s motto: “One People, One Nation, One Destiny.”

“The colonizers imposed racial division as a technique of control, which some politicians have even used.” Some politicians had even proposed “partition” and the motto

remained in name only. “Except in politics,” he chuckled along with the attendees muffled laughter. With a sobering expression, he urges that civics has to become part of the “national ethos,” in order to correct the damage postindependence politics wrought upon a nascent national development and full independence. “It is said when leaders of the Iroquois Nation make decisions, they consider the impact of decisions on the next seven generations.” This, he concludes, is a model that Guyana should consider as a decision-making model.

The image of the Guyanese nation as tethering on the brink of full-scale racial violence and insecurity continued to be a common thread, prompting another speaker from the Commonwealth Secretariat to mention the 2007 ethnically-driven post-electoral violence in Kenya, in which nearly 1, 000 peoples were killed. The message was clear. That Guyana is the first country in the region and the commonwealth to establish a Ministry dedicated to social cohesion was an encouraging first step to combatting “fear and extremism” as exhibited in other ethnically divided countries. As Percy Hintzen, drawing on Goldberg’s *The Racial State* argues (2004), a fractured nationalism resulting from race-base claims to control of the state apparatus led to socioeconomic and political crisis. It also “fit well with historicist claims of the immaturity of the colonized subject to rule and the inevitability of a reversion to undevelopment if such were the case” (2004: 118). The narrative of Guyana being on brink of chaos that necessitated northern tutelage became even more apparent as the forum progressed.

We rise as President Granger takes to the podium, immediately reminding the audience of “the state of emergency” that occurred on the 26<sup>th</sup> of May 1964. The

“disturbances” reminds the nation of its duty to prohibit the “social erosion” that leads to violence, he urged the audience. A former soldier, President Granger continues to radiate the demeanor of disciplined speech and mannerisms. “The lack of social cohesion arises through socioeconomic and class disparities. A country with larger land space than England and Ireland, natural resources and beautiful peoples need not be poor! We have to build not monuments but a basis for a moral community.” This would begin through the government’s public policy, which will move to eradicate extreme poverty and the worst forms of inequality, including gender and geographical divisions. “We speak of one nation, but it’s economically like two countries, the coastland and the hinterland.” This spatial segregation, along with providing equal access to education and employment opportunities, he told the audience was the primary focus of the policy. “Integration means to create a sense of belonging, to allow for people to not reduce their culture but to bring their culture into the Guyanese mix.”

Despite the rhetoric of cohesion and integration grounded in economic development, the representation of the nation, nationhood, and Guyanese peoplehood raised significant questions about the position of indigenous peoples within the nation-building project. Despite President Granger’s attention to the very real economic divisions that underpin coastal and hinterland bifurcations, the discourse of the roundtable revolved around the concept of integration which positioned the hinterland as a space of lack and disorder to be resolved through its joining the stream of coastal development or the expansion of resources from the coast inland. The reinscription of local government elections was pivotal, as elections had not occurred nation-wide in 21 years. Prior to 1994, the country

had not had local government elections for 24 years. Part of the coalition government's vision of social cohesion and "inclusionary democracy was the reconfiguring of governance structures, to incorporate the participation of local communities as a means to generate self-sufficiency and economic empowerment of villages. The focus on strengthening village economy harkens back to PNC government Forbes Burnham's cooperative villagization movements, or nation-wide self-help through agricultural development projects, which in addition to fostering the economic agricultural development of coastal rural villages aimed to integrate the hinterland through a similarly imposed development schema. As geographer Logan Hennessey has demonstrated, the cooperative socialist era marked the institutionalization of village-based development and politics toward the hinterland and Amerindian communities and "supplanted territorial affiliations as distinct peoples when it came to engaging the state government" (2013:1251). "Villagization" also began the process of granting significantly smaller indigenous territorial claims under the status of "Amerindian village" as part of an attempt by the government to foster hinterland integration and restructure indigenous geographies, a point I will explore further in the subsequent chapter. Beyond national anxieties, underlining the discourses deployed during the social cohesion roundtable is the troubling elision of the Amerindian subject through the metaphor of sacrifice, what I call the unthought position.

### **KAIE'S SACRIFICE AND THE UNTHOUGHT POSITION**

At the level of discourse, the opening cultural exposition at the *social cohesion roundtable*

reveals what might be called the unthought position of the Amerindian subject<sup>3</sup> within the national imaginary: a figure situated in a simultaneous position of hypervisibility and invisibility. The showcase depicts the possibility of a historically elusive cohesion, yet paradoxically, the very inclusivity it purports to represent by foregrounding the elements of *Guyanese*ness – primarily Africans, (East) Indians, and Amerindians – is tenuously achieved by this ‘absence/presence’ of the Amerindian subject, Kaie. Based on Guyanese poet AJ Seymour’s famous poem, *The Legend of Kaieteur*, the showcase reimagines Seymour’s version, which is itself a retelling of the local indigenous Patamona legend. The poem narrates the legend of Kaie, a Patamona leader, who in an act of heroic sacrifice to *Makonaima*, the Great Spirit, paddles over the roaring falls (known today as the iconic Kaieteur Falls) in order to save his people and restore peace between two warring indigenous nations. In other versions, it is disease and not war that has afflicted the Patamona nation, calling for Kaie’s death to appease *Makonaima*. In another, perhaps less romantic version, members of Kaie’s nation push his canoe over the falls, having grown tired of caring for an old man whose feet have become diseased with chigoes. AJ Seymour himself foregrounds the heroic deed—Kaie’s sacrifice to restore peace between the “savage Caribishi”<sup>14</sup> and his Patamona peoples, in which Kaie becomes immortalized in the landscape as a jutting rock at the outcrop of the world’s widest single drop waterfall. Kaie’s (re)imagined sacrifice as the impetus for reconciliation between the two warring ‘nations,’ (in this case African and Indian ‘nations’), points to the unthought position of the

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<sup>14</sup> AJ’s *The Legend of Kaieteur* references the Carib nation of Guyana, invoking historical and contemporary stereotypical representations of Caribs as warring, “cannibalistic” societies.

Amerindian subject in national development discourses that purport to foster inclusion. It is telling that Kaie's bodily (and spiritual) sacrifice is the enabling condition for Guyanese advancement— the redeemer of an elusive postcolonial futurity.

Even as a promising vision of alterity from inherited colonial racial/sexual hierarchies, in which they 'remember they were one,' the narrative excludes the Amerindian figure from the realization of this oneness through a symbolic and literal death: Kaie's role as a sacrificial hero is represented as a voluntary disappearance into the land. Kaie, as a racial-spatial figure and embodiment of a pre-colonial moment, becomes the catalyst for the rebirth of a new *Guyanese*ness. The subsequent (dis)placement of Kaie through his self-sacrifice reflects the notion that his radical alterity, presumably untouched by colonial and post-independence discord, makes him the perfect conduit for the collective healing of a fractured nation. Further, it elides historical colonial and indigenous social and political entanglements and depoliticizes indigenous issues by framing them as merely *cultural bearers* with no political investments in the contemporary political landscape (Moreno 2009: 145-53).

The placement of the indigenous subject within this narrative not only reflects 'coastlander ambivalence' about the hinterland and how it should be managed and incorporated, but also the power of the state, and those who benefit, to re-place indigenous landscapes (Trotz and Roopnaraine 2009: 25; Hennessy 2013: 1245). As Roopnaraine rightfully argues in his analysis of the hinterland as captured within coastlander



subjectivity, namely ‘porkknockers’<sup>15</sup> circulating discourses, these stories conjure the time-space of the interior and through its circulation as ‘a story about a story about a story’ construct a body of meaning (Trotz and Roopnaraine 2009: 23). Similarly, the showcase functions as a myth about a myth about a myth, in which Patamona people’s meanings of Kaieteur Falls as a *living place* is displaced and reimagined within the coastlander imaginary. Through a sense of nostalgic benediction, Kaie represents Guyanese oneness *and* essentializing difference, revealing a search for Guyanese spirit through the Amerindian figure.

Kaie’s sacrifice, noble in its pure act of selflessness, functions as paradox; while Kaie lives on in the place of Kaieteur Falls, immortalized in the cartography of the land, he ultimately does not live to partake in the reconciliation engendered through his self-effacement. In the *spirit* of oneness, Kaie facilitates a social cohesion that ultimately excludes him. Recast as open-handed sacrifice, performed with humble and infallible acquiescence reminiscent of colonial tropes of Amerindians as docile, noble *others*, it reinscribes the very racial/spatial hierarchy it seeks to dissolve. Rather than integrated, the story reestablishes the Amerindian subject at the bottom of an enduring colonial racial hierarchy. This (re)imagining begs the question, what place do indigenous peoples truly have within development discourse and how does Guyana envision itself to itself? What does it mean to imagine social cohesion through the act of Amerindian sacrifice? These

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<sup>15</sup> Porkknockers are primarily coastlanders who venture into the bush as freelance small-scale gold and diamond miners.

questions pose significant implications for indigenous peoples, in particular indigenous organizing around land through the acquisition of recognition and land titles. In the following chapter, I will map the colonial genealogy of the current indigenous recognition policy, the Amerindian Act of 2006, beginning with policies created under Dutch and British colonialism, which constructs a colonial regime of legality that facilitates indigenous dispossession.

## *Pale Sheep*

In the flash of demonstrations  
I glimpse other words

In between your faces contorted  
In their image  
Mobilized in the service of power

You, buck gyal  
You, sheep  
You, excess

Be meek  
Lay down your head  
To be sheared  
Of  
What you no longer need

Black man  
Black man  
Coolie man  
Coolie man  
Amerindian Buck/man?

Let us be pale sheep  
Frightened bastard children  
Thrust into the land

Onward, march

## Chapter Two: Colonial Regimes of Legality and the Amerindian Act

Passed in 2006 by the National Assembly of Guyana, the Amerindian Act Bill came into effect after four years through the Commencement Bill 2010, which sought to address the fact that the Act had failed to be implemented. The policy ostensibly grants collective rights recognition, establishes a form of “good governance” within and between tribal communities and the state, and implements a process for land titling to integrate the interior indigenous population into the larger Guyanese polity.<sup>16</sup> Upon inception, the policy was embraced by the state as a “radical change in the development of the Amerindian people’s situation,” and a true sign of meaningful change and progress.<sup>17</sup> Yet, indigenous NGOs have since labeled the bill a “regressive” violation of the Guyanese constitution and international human rights laws, and proof of institutionalization of government policies “that have been rejected by the people.”<sup>18</sup> The coalition contends that in light of the bills non-compliance, the bill may be challenged in legal channels and international human rights bodies. Thus described, the bill has led to unresolved conflict in indigenous efforts to contest state policies that ostensibly recognize collective rights, yet impose a reconfiguration of indigenous governance and constrict indigenous self-representation and identification.

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<sup>16</sup> I use the terms Indigenous and Amerindian in this chapter with the understanding that there is a political struggle for recognition and inclusion of the term *Indigenous* Peoples in the Amerindian Act. This is a site of contention as Creoles also seek to make claims as indigenous to the land of Guyana. I use ‘Amerindian’ more specifically in the discussion of the legislation, as this is the term used throughout the document.

<sup>17</sup> *Guyana Chronicle Online*. “National Assembly approves Amerindian Act 2006 (Commencement) Bill 2010”

<sup>18</sup> The Amerindian Peoples Association (APA); The Amerindian Action Movement of Guyana (TAAMOG) and the Guyana Organisation of Indigenous Peoples (GOIP)

More broadly, the Act imposes a statist form of recognition that works through a process of *sense-making* of the Other. That is, the state works to make recognizable indigenous practices, culture, and being that articulate with state narratives. As Linda Tuhiwai Smith has argued, colonialism was an “an image of imperialism, a particular realization of the imperial imagination...an image of the future nation it would become. In this image lie images of the Other,” and thus, it “[was] part of a grander narrative and yet part also of a very local, very specific experience” (2012: 23). In many ways the image of the Other, instituted under colonial rule as the Amerindian figure, continues to be negotiated and managed in the national imaginary. As Williams asserts “the national process aimed at homogenizing heterogeneity is fashioned around assimilating elements of that heterogeneity through appropriations that devalue them or that deny the source of their contribution, [and] it establishes what Gramsci referred to as a transformist hegemony” (Williams 1991:30). This transformist hegemony operates to structure a discursive field in “the way arguments are framed, the way dissent is controlled, and the way settlements are made” (Smith 2012:22).

This chapter argues that indigenous state recognition sustain an inherently colonial field of power and relationship between the state and indigenous peoples. Despite its reconfiguration from the period of Dutch and British colonial rule, the Guyanese state continues a similar stance of managing the hinterland space and indigenous peoples through legal techniques and processes that reconfigure indigenous land and governance. We will also see how indigenous peoples continue to be redirected toward engaging colonial legal channels as the arbitrator of their land claims, illustrating the tenuous control

indigenous communities have over enforcing their legal authority over their claims to the land as “titled villages.” Further it underscores how indigenous geographies and communal relationships with each other and to the land become enmeshed in state property regimes and ideologies about land use that place Amerindians within a space of corporeal-spatial precarity. Second, it reveals how spatial acts constitute the naturalization of social orders that position the hinterland as a redemptive space<sup>19</sup> for national development. This chapter concludes with a discussion on the need to rethink (dis)possession beyond the overt techniques of state violence toward indigenous peoples, but how dispossession functions through everyday *regimes of legality*; that is, examining how dispossession functions as structuring force in the quotidian spaces of life. Dispossession for indigenous peoples not only constitutes loss of land, as is often the primary analytic—land—but also is the loss of land/body/spirit, or indigenous livelihoods, preventing what indigenous scholar Gladys Tzul Tzul (2016) refers to as “the reproduction of life.”

The Guyanese state’s ambivalence toward the hinterland has its origins in the policy of “benign neglect” Dutch and British colonizers adopted toward the interior, with the exception of a few trading posts. Rather, colonial authorities concentrated sugar and rice plantations on the coastal strip of land, which was expanded through the exploitation of enslaved Africans and later, indentured Indians’ labor. Though indigenous lands had not been ceded or relinquished to the British colonial administration through conquest or treaty, nonetheless, as “empty lands” they were annexed as Crown Lands. This unofficial policy

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<sup>19</sup> For a similar argument regarding the state’s response to the issue of Trafficking in Persons (TIP) as a problem of the hinterland and a means of legitimizing the “state machinery,” see Trotz and Roopnaraine 2009.

of benign neglect shifted with the 1902 Aboriginal Indians Protection Ordinance and established ten reservations and appointed a Protector of Indians as guardian of the indigenous population. The succeeding 1910 Aboriginal Indian Ordinance further entrenched a guiding principle of paternalism and asserted colonial power and sovereignty, denigrating indigenous groups to the status of wards of the state. These ordinances did not confer reservation ownership, but rather were “designated as safe zones and could therefore be recovered by colonial officials” (Ifill 2009: 6).

The subsequent Amerindian Ordinance of 1951 granted provisions for state management of indigenous peoples, erecting what Butt-Colson has called the “‘administrative annexation’ of Amerindian peoples and their territories.” The Act concentrated disseminated residence patterns through an imposed centralized democratic system of governance, whereby reservations were renamed Amerindian Districts and fell under the management of the Department of the Interior (Colchester 2005: 280-281). During independence negotiations with British authorities, one condition agreed upon regarding the land rights of Amerindian peoples was the granting of “legal ownership to the lands where they were ‘ordinarily resident or settled,’” explicitly linking the transferal of colonial sovereignty to the emerging Guyanese state (Annex C, Section L of 1965 Guyana Independence Agreement).

The 1966 Amerindian Lands Commission conducted a comprehensive survey of Amerindian land claims, publishing a report in 1969 that made recommendations for land titling for the majority of Amerindian communities. However, the recommendations reflected substantially smaller territorial claims than those made by Amerindian

communities to the commission, calling on the government to grant 24,000 square miles of land out of a requested 43,000 square miles (Amerindian Lands Commission 1969). As part of the encompassing power of colonialism, “the colonial state had stealthily assimilated the Amerindians as its subjects and then claimed frontiers against other colonial states, on the basis of extending the protections of British law and order over them” (Colchester 2005:279).

Not until the international controversy of the Mazaruni hydropower project in 1976, and subsequent indigenous mobilization against the proposed project did the state act to uphold its legal obligation outlined in the independence agreement with the amendment of the 1951 Amerindian Act. Significantly, the amended Act “provid[ed] Amerindians with community title and the right to administer their areas through their captains and councils” (Colchester 2005: 285). The 1976 amendments included limited self-governance through democratically elected Village Councils; however, under the law, the state reserved the right to remove Captains and Councilors and replace them at their discretion and granted the Minister authority to suspend, change, or revoke any created village council rules.<sup>20</sup> Lauded by the predominantly Afro-Guyanese PNC Forbes Burnham government as a progressive step toward hinterland integration and indigenous recognition, the ordinance reinforced state control over indigenous territories and reconfigured indigenous governance according to a statist model. Notably, the PNC government relied on the ALC

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<sup>20</sup> The Amerindian Act 1976 Part IV(14). The Act refers to ‘Minister’ without specifying which Minister.



report in their configuration of the new Act, under which nearly forty-eight other villages did not receive collective title (APA 1998).

Further, this post-independence period of cooperative socialism asserted governing policies designed to facilitate economic production and had the lasting effect of ‘respatializing’ the interior (Hennessy 2013). Marked by a pronounced ideological shift, following more than a decade of socialism under the Forbes Burnham PNC rule in the 1960s, the government swiftly moved toward structural adjustment and neoliberal development under a predominantly Indo-Guyanese regime, the People's Progressive Party (PPP) in 1992. The corresponding expansion of resource extraction, development, and environmental conservation initiatives not only inserted indigenous communities into the global economy, but also yielded significant social, economic, and environmental impacts on the livelihoods of Amerindian communities (J. Forte and Melville 1989; Colchester 1997; Canterbury 1998; Colchester, LaRose, and James 2002; J. Bulkan and Bulkan 2006).

The preoccupation of post-independence governments to construct a cohesive Guyanese nationalism, apparent in the lexicon of security, reveals the state’s ongoing anxieties over the hinterland and Amerindian sovereignty. The spatial distance between the post-independence administrations on the coast and the remote living space of the indigenous were perceived as potentially undermining the nationalistic project to create a (imagined) cohesive national identity amenable to economic development and international investments. As Brackette Williams contends, ideological struggles over the production of Guyanese identity “aimed to *place* groups within a single sociocultural and political order and to legitimate their right to participate in all aspects of society and

economy...[that] proposed particular and competing intersections of territorial nationalism and cultural identities” (Williams 168, original emphasis).

Land, its acquisition and control, undergirds the state’s anxiety over consolidating state sovereignty not only against internal threats but also against claims to nearly two-thirds of Guyana’s territory by Venezuela and Suriname; as such, the 1976 Amerindian Act adopted “atomized” processes of land titling, as cooperative socialism advanced a holistic agenda of “spatial and cultural consolidation” based on the villagization scheme implemented in coastal communities to streamline agricultural development (Hennessy 2013: 1257). These processes reformulated contiguous spaces of shared territories of distinct Amerindian identities into porous boundaries, effectively fragmenting large swathes of territory and dividing the population into titled and untitled segments, leaving apertures of state land in between them.

Though cooperative socialism shifted to a neoliberal consolidation, the titling model of the previous period informs the 2006 Amerindian Act, which outlines the composition and function of village councils to “provide for the planning and development of the Village” (13(1)(c), and ‘manage and regulate the use and occupation of Village lands’ (13)(1)(e). Further, it extols the extent of the powers of the elected toshao and village council, whose rights to make rules, or any amendments to these rules must obtain two-thirds vote from the village *as well as* approval by the Minister, making councils vulnerable to the directives of the government of the day. To acquire communal land title, “a community may apply in writing to the Minister for a grant of State lands provided it has been in existence for at least twenty-five years; and at the time of the application and

for the immediately preceding five years, it comprised at least one hundred and fifty persons.”<sup>21</sup> Indigenous communities that have traditionally inhabited land prior to colonial and state rule, must apply to the state to legitimate their “traditional occupation and use” of the land.

Moreover, the language of *ownership*, as evinced in the Independence Agreement and subsequent Amerindian Acts, frames recognition of Amerindian land claims through Eurocentric conceptualization of land, as propertied ownership. This perception of land delimits and displaces distinct cultural and spiritual attachments and embodied relationships to the land. As one villager proclaimed, “land is we life;” not mere hyperbole, it signals indigenous modes of interdependence with the land. Though seemingly more progressive than other commonwealth/CARICOM countries, e.g. Belize and Suriname, statutory recognition of indigenous land titles in Guyana paradoxically, reproduces a condition of coloniality, facilitating the erosion of indigenous control over their lands and territories and marginalizing indigenous interests, knowledges, and voices. The state arbitrates indigenous relations to the land, qualifying the extent of actual recognition, codification, and realization of indigenous land rights, even as it prioritizes economic ventures that undermine indigenous self-determination. This socio-spatial reconfiguration of territory demonstrates how state power functions *through* legal mechanisms, placing indigenous peoples within what might be called *corporeal-spatial precarity*.

Consequently, this reordering of indigenous lands through regimes of legality constrain village autonomy and governance and engenders land and resource grabbing,

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<sup>21</sup> Section VI (60)(1)(a)(b).

expansive annexation for extractive industries, and landlordism<sup>22</sup>, with the increasing presence of foreign and multilateral companies at the level of large-scale ventures. Similar to its colonial predecessors, post-independence governments merely extended this logic of protectionism and intervention, which limit the rights and property of Amerindians through its uncritical reinscription of inherited colonial policies and ideologies about the hinterland and its communities. This ongoing grinding away of indigenous lands and sovereignty constitute indigenous dispossession; that is, legal and spatial techniques of power, e.g. contested demarcation and titling processes that obscure local knowledges, collective memory, and sense of place; the separation of indigenous territories into “titled” and “untitled” lands, increased vulnerability to the environmental and social impacts of mining and logging activities, all of which enable the shift of lands into state control for neoliberal development. Perceived as inhabiting an inherently neutral and objective domain, this chapter demonstrates how legalities, specifically, recognition, function as a mechanism of control that subjects indigenous peoples to vectors of state power as part of a continuum of more explicit, violent expressions of dispossession.

To the extent that post-independence governments censure indigenous peoples for demanding a recognition policy that actually reflects indigenous interests and voices and make indigenous peoples governable through a legal regime that masks its own complicity with the dominant Western episteme, indigenous peoples are forced to directly engage, indeed adapt to, a juridical system that perpetuates skewed and narrow definitions of what

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<sup>22</sup> See Bulkan, J., “*Red Star over Guyana*”: *Colonial-style Grabbing of Natural Resources but New Grabbers*, (Conference paper presented at the International Conference on Global Land Grabbing, University of Sussex, 2011).

constitutes Amerindian community, livelihood, and being. Through recognition policies that advance neoliberal economic expansion, the state continues to extend indigenous dispossession of their collective lands and territories, even as it distances itself from the colonial violence of the past through discourses of cohesion, unity, progress, and the ‘good life’ for all.

### **AMICABLE ENTANGLEMENTS**

The National Tshaos Conference is an annual conference open to members of the public, including village residents, tshaos, members of civil society organizations, and everyday citizen; however, the reception I and others have received reflects the air that you must be provide a legitimate connection in order to attend. To be certain that I would be able to attend, I had contacted GOIP to see if there was space for me to attend through the delegation, and they assured me that I should travel to the capital for the conference, as it would be one of the few opportunities to engage with tshaos and leaders across different regions and to hear firsthand the shared experience of many Amerindian communities. For the tshaos, it was a weeklong opportunity to engage directly with state officials from various ministries and to advocate for their communities’ needs and challenges. Most of the conversations I overheard reflected the core thread that ran through each day’s proposed agenda, simmering and irrefutable: land.

Mark called me to let me know he was already inside. I hurried up the conference hall stairs making my way to the main conference hall, my crisp white shirt already sticking to the skin between my shoulder blades. As a member of the executive body of the National

Toshaos Council, Mark had arrived several days earlier for elections of the next executive body. Elected by village toshaos nationally, hundreds of leaders from across the nation were anticipated to participate.

I inauspiciously pulled aside the thick red leather partition to peer into the room to find an empty seat. Blue cushioned seats are aligned in rows oriented in a circle, divided into several sections elevated above the central floor where the main speakers would take to the podium. I withdrew, and noticed a man in an ill-fitting black suit approach me. He peers at my shirt “You are...?” I shake his outstretched hand, puzzled. I reply, “...from Barbina Hill.” He calls a name I do not recognize. I narrow my eyes as he continues to look at me. “Are you a CDC member... A resident?” He asks exasperated. Recognition dawns and I realize he is looking for a nametag.

“No, a member of GOIP.” He pauses, confusion written plainly on his face, but steps aside and waves me forward to find my seat. The amphitheater style conference room feels like the inside of a space shuttle, with sparse clusters of people that appear to be seated based on their respective regions and villages. In the center of the room, a slide show of beautiful panoramic shots of Guyana’s landscape flowed seamlessly from the beauty of one region to the next, interspersed with candid shots of everyday life. Fishermen, Amerindians conducting everyday activities, well known food dishes like seven curry, pepper pot, a woman standing with a large wooden spoon stirring farina, a hard yellow grain primarily eaten in the Rupununi Amerindian villages, Amerindian dancers, a close-up of a man with a taut bow and arrow aimed slightly off camera, the intensity of his concentration leaping from the photo. Others canoed through one of Guyana’s many rivers.

I glance around and realize toshaos are sectioned according to regional administrative districts. A placard hangs on the bars in front of each respective grouping. Regions 1 and 9 by far have the largest contingent of representatives of indigenous villages and leaders, with toshaos from Regions 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 10 designated as one entire section to itself. These regions reflect not only the largest districts in terms of governance and the amount of Amerindian villages in those areas, but also in terms of development initiatives undergoing in those areas. Mining and forestry concessions, along with hinterland ecotourism figured prominently in Regions 1 and 9, known simply as ‘Northwest’ and ‘Rupununi.’

When the video fades, the Minister of Indigenous Affairs, Sydney Allicock enters directly across the conference hall from where I am seated, two men at his flank. A group stands in the back row upon his arrival. I catch the expression of a woman as she looks expectantly at those around her who remain seated, gesturing urgently for people to stand. Gradually, the conference room is filled with shuffling feet and chairs folding in on themselves, as people stand to acknowledge the minister’s entrance. After he is seated, we mirror him.

Soon after, the program facilitator informs the audience that we will begin shortly, and will begin with an opening prayer from a member of the Paramakatoi village who will lead the opening of the ceremony in the Patamona language. Silence descends and then another woman takes to the podium to lead the national anthem. “On the count of three. One, two, three...,” she prompts. Sober voices fill the conference room, echoing timbres that sound reminiscent of a congregational religious song. Directly after, she promptly informs them

to remain standing for the national anthem. She leads the anthem, the language falling from her lips in clipped tones.

The Minister Valerie Garrido-Lowe, an indigenous woman described as a “daughter of the soil” from Region 1 during the Councilor’s introduction, begins her address acknowledging his Excellency, President Grangers, other Ministers, members of the National Tshaos Council, other officials peering up at the audience through her glasses perched on her nose. “That many of you have traveled long distances serves to remind us of just how important our work and Ministry of Indigenous Peoples Affairs is.” She assures that the APNU-AFCU government will work “tirelessly” to provide step-by-step assistance to indigenous communities. “To the tshaos and councilors especially, and to all villages attending today, I would like you to note a very important fact. Just recently, you had your tshaos elections in every village. The Ministry of Indigenous Affairs allowed you to have free and fair democratic elections among yourselves. We did not try to influence you in any way. So the tshaos you chose, and even yesterday when you chose your chairmen for the NTC, you did that all by yourselves. And that is how it should be. The Ministry of Indigenous Affairs is here as your support base, nothing else.”

“Our indigenous peoples and the hinterland,” she states, “is not another nation, but *citizens* of Guyana.” She invites the dozens of tshaos in attendance from the various Amerindian villages to put forward their ideas for development and that the government directly invites them “to develop your village economy.” The audience breaks into applause. “Of course we know the difficulties you have....we’re aware of the need, *BUT* we want you to develop your village economy, a *vibrant* village economy. You must be so



*strong* in your village economy. We as a peoples—indigenous hinterland peoples...we have to join this train to prosperity and development. We have to jump on it.”

It was during the intermission break from the program, when we were assured that “traditional” food, dance and customs would be on full display, that I ran into several toshaos and leaders I had met in other civil society workshops and “stakeholder meetings” between government officials and indigenous peoples for various upcoming foreign agreements, including the EU-FLEGT agreement, the new legality system that would be put in place to ensure the security and legality of timber and large scale commercial forestry.

While waiting in the long line that wrapped around the corner of the expansive, and white conference center, I overheard an elder man, dressed in a blue short-sleeved button down remark to another that he had heard demarcation costs were estimated around 30-40 million. “They know Amerindians can’t do it (demarcate the land),” he said knowingly. Throughout the conference, a sense of mistrust and tenuous hopefulness permeated the air, the question lingering of what made this administration different from the previous administration, and ruling political party, which had been in power for 23 years. Although the government was a different manifestation of the People’s National Congress (PNC) government, a newly created joint coalition between the APNU (for many merely a reincarnation of the PNC government) and the Alliance for Change (AFC), many questioned whether this coalition would be a mask of the PNC well-known 28-year leadership. The ghost of the PNC party was reflected in the hotly contested historical memory of the Forde Burnham regime—an anti-colonial charismatic leader determined to

lead Guyana from its own colonial shadows or a dictatorship committed to solidifying power and wealth for Afro-Guyanese citizens, or a “black man” looking out for “black men.”

The conference hall was awash in boisterous conversation and whispered conversations about whether *this* administration might be truthful in their expansive vision for hinterland development and securing indigenous land titling. Many of the toshaos knew one another, either through familial relations, similar NTC meetings in the past, or through the Amerindian Peoples’ Association (APA) or the Guyanese Organization of Indigenous Peoples (GOIP), two organizations where its members ventured into the majority of indigenous villages to interface with them with respect to various bureaucracies and government ministries. I recognized a few faces from workshops I had attended in Georgetown, yet I was incredibly aware of the stark division along the lines of gender. The majority of toshaos were male, with a smattering of Amerindian female toshaos. Navigating the space as a woman-identified “mixed” Amerindian posed challenging dynamics at time, particularly as it intersected with other factors of age and regional affiliations. During the initial part of the conference, the chief of GOIP, introduced me to several men at one of the cloth-covered tables. In these contexts, where political tensions lingered around the recent national elections and political campaigning for support of the new government in power, I knew well enough than to introduce myself as an affiliated researcher with the GOIP organization, but rather emphasized my position as an Amerindian woman invested in understanding the complex and overlapping factors that limited Amerindian self-governance and determination and sovereignty over their titled

lands. This often meant a gendered performance. While I was invited to partake in discussions outside of the forum, the discussion was often centered on topics that were deemed of utmost concern by these male leaders. The common thread throughout much of my engagements was the centrality of addressing the tenuous control of indigenous communities over their respective lands. Rarely was an explicit connection made between the precarity of indigenous lands and the wide-scale violence enacted on the bodies of Amerindian women. This indifference was exhibited in the subsequent presentations that outlined the procedural processes of land titling through the masculine discourses of national security. Further, it demonstrated how indigenous governance was domesticated and made sense of through neoliberal rationalities that asserted an analogous relationship between the “village body” and the functions and purpose of a “corporate entity,” charged with ensuring “care” through properly guarding the overall social and economic development of the village.

The returning session following the break for lunch immediately engaged the core concern from which all other social ills devolved, from the perspective of many of the leaders present: the question of land. Led by another official in the Ministry of Indigenous Affairs, Attorney Nicholson is given the “daunting task” of providing an overview of the Amerindian Land Titling Project (ALT) in order to provide the basis from which land titling is currently being conducted. A land issue decades long, “indigenous land and rights to land of grave concern,” He assures the audience. “This is a challenging phenomena affecting other parts of the world...an issue of land tenure and security.” The APNU-AFC

in its 2015 Elections Manifesto directly addresses the concerns of First Peoples in Guyana, he assures us.

“Guyana’s constitution is clear. We the Guyana People value the special place of indigenous peoples and recognize their rights as citizens to land.” I quickly notice that the manifesto, however, does not declare that Guyana’s First Peoples will be recognized on the basis of being *indigenous peoples* but as *citizens*. He launches into a detailed summary of the Amerindian Land Titling project nation-wide. The project, he states, intended to ensure security to land and resources through titling and to foster long-term planning for the development of Amerindian villages. The project would unfold through three phases. The first phases aimed to demarcate 68 communities that already received grants and have absolute titles for additional 45 communities. The second phase was to ensure greater access to mechanisms for resolving land disputes. And the third phase of the project focused on the development of “effective communication strategy” to provide accessible, relevant, comprehensive information in the context of the Amerindian land titling process.

The unit responsible for the project, the ALT unit, in its first year of commencement (October 2013-2014) processed several extension applications of 13 communities targeted. One application was completed and an absolute grant ready to be issued; two communities were “favorably considered” and pending cabinet review before title was to be issued; four applications for extension were pending approval for demarcation due to mining and other activities within their proposal for extension and are currently awaiting review and input from the Ministry of Indigenous Affairs for further action; and six approved demarcations were to be conducted in September 2015.

He paused, rustling to the next page of his report. During the second year of the project (October 2014-October 2015), 16 applications for extensions were targeted. Of those requests, fifteen requests were investigated. The final investigated was completed for four and currently awaiting cabinet review. An additional eleven investigations are slated to commence September 2015. Over the span of two years, a mere 29 communities had been targeted, and currently stood in various stages of investigation and consideration. Fewer still had been issued “absolute grants<sup>23</sup>.”

Regarding the second phase of the project, that is, mechanisms for resolving land disputes, five free prior and informed consent (FPIC) and “dispute resolution” workshops had been conducted, with 166 participated benefitting from the initiative. Part of these workshops included, “training to employ *civil* alternatives to deal with land and other related disputes,” he said. The final phase, developing a communication strategy, had meant the search for local communication experts as consultants for the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs and UNDP. Three experts had been short-listed, with the final candidate retained on a short-term contractual basis to develop a communication strategy and handbook. Unsurprisingly, the current administration, after reviewing the ALT project determined that satisfactory achievements had not been met after two years of implementation.

This administration, the APNU-AFC coalition, will resolve land issues in a “timely and amicable manner for all,” he concluded. I quickly realized that the overwhelming amount

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<sup>23</sup>Absolute grant refers to villages that had received land title and demarcation of those titled lands. Communities were often granted land title for years before undergoing land demarcation.

of information provided was meant to assure attendees that the new coalition marked a turn to transparency and accountability, a moment in which indigenous peoples' concerns would be taken on as a core objective in the years ahead. It also served a political objective: to remind participants of the corruption and broken democracy of the past. This moment was a turn to a national rebirth and renewal, one in which difference—*indigenous* difference—was valued and seen as part of the nation's path toward progress and development. Development could not in fact occur when the conditions of its original peoples starkly reflected the nation's stain of colonialism. Yet, it was this very distancing move that I observed during the conference that framed the “indigenous problem” as merely circulating within a restricted realm of the political, in which the change of political parties control of the government also signaled an opening for full indigenous livelihoods. It did not address how regimes of legality underlining the current political order reflected a more embedded colonial structure that in fact shaped the realm of possibilities for *amicable resolution* of indigenous land struggles for recognition and against dispossession.

“The village council is a legal body,” Robert, former lawyer-advocate alongside the Amerindian Peoples Association and newly appointed Special Assistant to Minister Allcock of the Ministry of Indigenous Affairs explains. Over the rustling of papers, he directs the toshaos to various sections of the 2006 Amerindian Act, the current indigenous recognition policy. As relates to governance, he explains that “Amerindian villages” are actually considered a “corporate body” before the law. “[It is] similar to what one may term a company...however, with a company, when it is registered [it] falls under the law called the Companies Act.” He outlines specific provisions in the Amerindian Act as relates to

communal land ownership and the granting of title to land. “Section 63, subsection 1 outlines the process for application to communal land ownership...and if [the] application is approved, title granted under the State Land Acts.” His voice is carefully modulated, and he carefully defines the legal terms used in the Act. He suggests some of the provisions could benefit from possible improvements to the law to make them compatible with established international standards in regard to indigenous ownership.

The Act provides provision for “Amerindian community,” which under the Act is a village that does not have a title. He pauses in order to allow time for the information to process before adjusting his glasses to continue. The distinction between “community” and “village” becomes less opaque as he moves methodically through key aspects of the Act regarding land titling processes. “A village that applies for extension already has *title* whereas an Amerindian *community* is a set of people living together but has no title and must apply for title to become an *Amerindian village*, and is conferred a village council established by the Minister as the village council is the only body that can hold the title for the village on behalf of the village.” For many indigenous leaders and residents, they made no distinction and merely saw the village as a communal relationship. This was increasingly frustrating for villages that had applied for formal title over the years, waiting for approval while they functioned as a status village without any of the legal protections. “Part III of the Act,” he says outlines the governance of these Amerindian villages. “Section 13, subsection 1, ...d. The key function of the village council [is] to more importantly hold that title for the benefit and *use*. The council [sic] as custodian...almost a

sacred duty. A fiduciary duty termed in the law.” He explains that those people on the council holding the land for the village must do so “in a manner that is equitable and fair.”

The village lands are known as titled lands. I glance up around the silent room. Some faces have deep line carved on their foreheads; others peer over and through glasses. Others are watching Robert attentively, nodding their heads as he makes each point. Others are whispering to one another, or writing on notepads. The elder in the row below me has copy of the Amerindian Act open, his head bent over as he attempting to follow each section. Village lands as entrusted to the council, Robert continues “cannot dispose of any interests or rights, or title *except* as provided in the village act.” Finally stepping back from the podium, he looks up at the crowd, speaking more directly with the present leaders. “But...we have heard of people selling lands...money is passed.” He nods gravely. There are a few murmurs in the audience. “Where some people inside or outside village “buy” land.” He signals air quotes. But, he states, “It is illegal to sell village lands.” Beyond me, I hear audible hums of agreement.

“The council, not just the toshao should be aware of any of this.” Even the NTC is also a legal body made of individuals...each of us is a *legal person* with *legal personalities*.” He returns to his notes, “Section 44, subsection. Attempts to dispose of any rights, land, titling, except as provided in the Act, is void, even if in fact it may appear to happen.” “It’s empty,” he exclaims, before reiterating that communities should not think of selling parts of the land because the Act does not allow it.

“What the law provides for is lease agreements.” He explains. Under another section of the law where leases can be done for “special purposes” such as agriculture, tourism,



and other “sustainable practices.” As a lawyer, he explains that he has done research on the behavior of states toward indigenous peoples. “Guyana as a member of the international community has obligations,” He assures us. Guyana has moved to approve the 2007 UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). “Some argue it is not binding.” The articles themselves he explains are “customary international law,” which is binding of member states of the United Nations. In the case of Belize, indigenous peoples have been able to obtain rights employing UNDRIP, in which the chief justice ruled in agreement. “No state should go to the United Nations in approval before the world [of UNDRIP], and then not uphold it in their county.” He shakes his head as he explains that the Belizean court had reached a similar moral-ethico position and approved the declaration within its local jurisprudence. “Similarly, our court should be persuaded to do likewise.” He states firmly, before reminding the audience that granted titles still excluded bodies of water, which present significant problems for Amerindian villages, especially riverine communities.

The 2006 UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination, which monitors the implementation of the United Nations’ international convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination, made the following observations in their report on Guyana:

The committee is deeply concerned by the lack of legal recognition of the rights of ownership and possession of indigenous communities over the land they traditionally occupy and about the State party’s practice of granting land titles excluding bodies of waters and subsoil resources to indigenous communities on the basis of numerical and other criteria not necessarily in accordance with the traditions of indigenous communities concerned, thereby depriving untitled and ineligible communities of rights to land they traditionally occupy.

The committee recommended that the Guyanese state recognize and protect the rights of all indigenous communities to own, develop, and control the land which they traditionally occupy, including water and subsoil resources, to safeguard their right to use lands not exclusively occupied by them, to which they traditionally had access to for their subsistence.

Along with the recommendations put forth by the committee, concrete measures were suggested. The first of which was to demarcate or identify lands indigenous communities traditionally occupy and use; the second, to establish adequate procedures and to define clear and just criteria to resolve land claims by indigenous people “within the domestic juridical system *while taking due account of relevant indigenous customary laws.*” While these recommendations to grant titles, and control over bodies of water and subsoil resources are based in international laws that govern states, one key element prohibits the holistic incorporation of these international laws: in order for these international laws to be incorporated in Guyana, it must be ratified by an act of Parliament. As it stands, Guyana’s constitution has limited the protection proffered by these international laws by classes that limit the extent to which these protections apply to the Guyanese state.

“This is the opportune time for these discussions to occur in an amicable way, and reasonable way.” He clarifies for those present the basis on which state recognition is conferred within the Guyanese context. “Our rights to the land and resources is a transferal of the state, a grant of State Lands.” “The law does not in any way recognize that as indigenous peoples, you—or *we,*” he adds, “have an *inherit* right to land because of our status as indigenous peoples.” The conference room falls silent, as the realization dawns

for many of them that legal recognition, rather than established on the basis of an inherent prior rights, is recognized on the colonial legal doctrine as landowners. This line of thinking runs contrary to the demands of local indigenous organizations and communities for rights on the basis of occupying a distinct position as First Peoples. He explains that in several countries in the commonwealth jurisdiction, like Belize and Australia, this doctrine had been rejected. Yet its implementation on the ground continued to be an area of significant contention between the respective states and their indigenous peoples.

“Who was here to meet Columbus?” He asks unexpectedly. The crowd rustles in their chairs, some exclaiming outright that, indeed, Amerindians discovered him. His rhetorical question seems to highlight the seemingly nonsensical nature of the debate around indigenous prior rights and the colonial paradigm upon indigenous lands were portrayed as being granted to indigenous peoples by the state. His critique, issued before the numerous state officials, seems to open a momentary space where the true nature of recognition, its inherent coloniality, is not only revealed to respective leaders but also the state’s face.

“The legal doctrine and jurisprudence do not help our case very much,” He concludes. The 2009 court case, *Devroy Thomas and the Village Council of Arau v. The Attorney General of Guyana & the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission*, took the state to court against mining concessions the village claimed had been granted on their ancestral lands, lands that were adjacent to their formally titled village lands. The case marked the first instance of a village claim to title based on the occupation of land from time immemorial. In the ruling decision against the village’s claims, the Chief Justice accused the community of “blowing hot and cold” for having accepted a titled claim on the basis of occupation

from time memorial, while attempting to make a similar claim to another area. On the basis of Dutch and English legalities he asserted that the community did not have sufficient evidence to demonstrate their claims through neither their customary laws nor practices in respect to land tenure nor through occupation of time immemorial.

“Some argue the ruling took us back to colonial days.” Robert proclaimed. The ruling had deep political implications for mining claims on village lands in other communities, setting a dangerous precedent in which village rights could be potentially subverted by the precedence for mining operations. In some cases, he explained, the state granted titles with the clause “*save and except* all lands legally held,” with most of those lands primarily being mining claims and concessions to private persons. Land titles were given and then substantial areas of the title rescinded. “In some cases half of the lands.” I heard murmuring around the room.

“If you get a title like that, what you’re given is court cases to last you a lifetime and your children and children to come court cases...because the private owners can always take you to court...for some reason, to enforce *their* rights.” He warns them gravely. “Whenever you get titles it should be *unencumbered* and provide *security* for you and your community.” My heart sinks as I watch the grave faces of toshaos and village captains processing the magnitude of the implications for their respective communities. I glanced in the upper corner to see leaders present from my own familiar community. For many of them, this policy, explained as painstakingly as possible, merely publicly acknowledges the political implication for the indigenous self-determination. Their own lived experiences

attested to the impacts of maneuvering within a precarious legal system that prioritizes a socio-political order undergirded by colonial law.

As this extended exchange between the indigenous lawyer, as a representative and intermediary of the law, and the toshaos illustrates, the notion of the law as seemingly neutral and objective obscures a more nuanced understanding of land struggles against encroachment for mining and other extractive industries, along with the coloniality of mapping practices that reproduce modern conceptualizations of the land as property and its use as primarily being in the service of creating more productive and economically self-sufficient villages aligned with the national agenda of neoliberal development. The common rhetoric around transparency and direct communication presents the national government as straining to achieve synergy between indigenous rights, democracy, and national development, even as it illustrates the ways the state retains territorial authority through the discourse of rights and a legal regime.

As indigenous scholar Joanne Barker (2011) argues, the law does not function as an apolitical or abstract space, but shapes and is shaped by relations of power. Throughout the conference, one notes the repetitious assurance that the law will facilitate *amicable relations*, as if the law mediates a relationship of even relations between indigenous peoples and the state. Indeed, there is no homogenous or static relationship between the state and any particular indigenous group in Guyana with respect to the granting and protection of indigenous land claims, yet, it undoubtedly reveals how land remains a core thread that structures the relations between indigenous peoples, the state, and the complex indigenous-Creole dynamics. The discourse of amicability is inflected through several

axes. The first stems from a national anxiety over the limited scope of the Guyanese political imaginary, insofar as it demonstrates national fears over political instability grounded in a history of racial and ethnic turmoil and violence. Second, a colonial paradigm as the arbitrator of indigenous land disputes, directing indigenous peoples to engage with a legal structure, which contrary to statements that amending the existing recognition policy, functions exactly as it was originally designed: in line with maintaining colonial relations of power, constituting a coloniality of recognition.

Writing from a Canadian context, indigenous Dené scholar Glen Coulthard (2014) examines how the self-determination efforts and aims of indigenous peoples in Canada have been consistently framed in the language of recognition. In recent decades, there has been an increasing turn to “recognition” as a mediating and reconciliatory force for the conditions of marginalization and oppression underlining indigenous-state relations in the global context. The recognition of cultural distinctiveness, state-indigenous treaty obligations, and the right to self-determination and governance occupies a central role in examining the stakes surrounding contestations over identity and difference in colonial contexts. Using Frantz Fanon’s critique of Hegel’s master-slave dialectic, Coulthard problematizes the hegemonic assumption that “the structure of domination” underlining indigenous-state relations in Canada can be undermined through a liberal politics of recognition. Rather than establishing a “Hegelian ideal of reciprocity,” grounded in a multicultural liberal coexistence, the contemporary politics of recognition merely extends the colonial configurations that indigenous demands for recognition have attempted to transform (2007: 437). Although referring to a settler-colonial context, Coulthard’s

analysis of the underlining relations of power that merely reconfigure in the state's ostensibly benevolent position toward indigenous peoples points to the shifting position of violence in the contemporary settler colonial context.

As this chapter demonstrates, the state qualifies the extent of "actual recognition, codification, and implementation of indigenous rights," insofar as these rights do not disrupt the neoliberal economic model of development, effectively maintaining a condition of coloniality. In her analysis of the increasing global recognition of indigenous rights, Marjo Lindroth (2014) examines how the neoliberal rationalities of official reports of the United Nations special rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples obscures these expert interpretations that render indigenous peoples "governable" through discursive techniques of power. Similarly, the mobilization of the language of international institutions in the Guyanese context suggests that these external actors provide an apolitical and objective analysis of the rights of indigenous peoples, as the mediator between monolithic totalitarian states and indigenous peoples in order to establish a liberal democratic society that would also facilitate its economic advancement. I argue that the view of the state and international bodies within this forum similarly project an image of the law as a democratic space, in which both state and indigenous interests can be reconciled. However, closer inspection reveals how the forum, seemingly a transparent and thus more equitable means of engagement, operates within proscribed rules of engagement between the state and its subjects.

Although indigenous concerns and issues are registered during this exchange, it functions within an imposed legal framework. Thus, the issue is not necessarily whether or

not indigenous peoples have a right to self-determination over their lands, but to what extent a space of agreement can be reached, such that rights and development co-exist within a symmetrical relationship. Though understood as a check to the power of the state, Lindroth contends that this governance approach to indigenous peoples is “inscribed in rationalities of governance, in practices of (neoliberal) power” (2014: 342). Instead of inherently conflictual objectives, indigenous rights and the propagation of neoliberal market logic, she demonstrates that these two aims can be compatible through a “lexicon of good governance” in recognizing indigenous rights (ibid)(also see Hindess, 2004; Larner and Walters, 2004).

In line with Lindroth, I contend that this “lexicon of good governance” manifests in the state’s approach to indigenous rights as being reconciled through a change in political power. Throughout the forum, indigenous leaders are urged to adopt a comportment of rationality and being reasonable, as the current political moment signals an opening for meaningful dialogue and substantive attention to the issues affecting indigenous communities. The implication is that it is not rational for indigenous communities to demand immediate resolution to land claims and conflicts between miners and indigenous communities. The starting point for these political officials inscribe a temporality to indigenous rights claims. As the newly elected political party, indigenous peoples must concede a willingness to grant the new administration time to unravel the long-standing corruption of the previous administration. As activist anthropologist Charles Hale (2005) has argued, accompanying this shift is the movement of the state from adversary to arbiter (also see Warren and Jackson 2002), introducing new complexities in which the state



determines to what extent rights will be granted and implemented, as well as reinvigorating standards of “authenticity” and “worthiness;” this is an imposition that places indigenous leaders and intellectuals in an “authorized space of compromise”—balancing pragmatic and material demands with more utopic political alternatives (20). This “domestication effect,” which he describes as a “shift from protest to proposal,” is inherent to governmentality itself, also results in the remaking of racial hierarchies, even in the face of fervent assertions of ethnic equality, harmony, and unity (2005: 18). Notably, multicultural neoliberalism enables an articulation with “cultural racism.” The “affirmation of cultural particularity” appeared to represent what indigenous communities have been struggling to achieve; however, it has generated the contradictory consequences of neoliberal multiculturalism: “extending the grid of intelligibility (borrowing from a term from James C. Scott (1998)), defining legitimate (and underserving) subjects of rights, and remaking racial hierarchy” (2005:13). Further, it reveals the ways the state (re)territorializes indigenous communities through regimes of legalities that engender the (dis)possession of indigenous lands, opening up lands to later be absorbed into mining concessions for extractive development. In the next chapter I will examine how land titling processes and the restructuring of indigenous governance through state recognition constrain indigenous self-determination to a liminal space and advance a neoliberal logic that frames indigenous peoples as “partner subjects to neoliberal governmentality,” through a process of neoliberal subject formation, even as it reveals how this space is also contested, reproduced, and disrupted (Odysseos 2010: 343).



### Chapter Three: “Dis Land is We Own”

On Wednesday, February 25, 2015 news broke that the people of the Amerindian Hururu Village in the administrative region 10 signed a twenty-five year deal with company, Bai Shan Lin Forestry Inc. to lease 27.4 acres of village lands at \$5,000 GYD an acre. The then Minister of Amerindian Affairs, Pauline Sukhai—currently embroiled in a public scandal about the 2.1 million Guyana dollars of tax money<sup>24</sup> used for her own personal cosmetic care—presided over the agreement, signing on behalf of the Government of Guyana. Speculation surged as the Regional Chairman and A Partnership for National Unity-Alliance For Change (APNU +AFC) Campaign Chairman for the Upper Demerara-Upper Berbice, wrote an open letter to the editor of a national newspaper expressing concern over whether the Amerindian community had actually been involved in a free, prior, and informed consultation leading up to the agreement. The Chairman’s allegation along with similar accusations from villagers themselves fueled rumors around the PPP government’s clandestine economic agreements with China that facilitated the exploitation of indigenous communities and lands. Kaitaur News published a series of aerial images of truckloads of cut logs slated for export to China splashed across numerous news headlines alongside charges of illegal logging ventures worth billions of dollars<sup>25</sup>. Despite interviews conducted with villagers from the various regions affected, the Guyana Forestry Commission released a statement assuring the public that the Chinese company had not

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<sup>24</sup> Approximately USD \$10,000.

<sup>25</sup> Kaitaur News, August 13, 2014 “Exploration or Exploitation?”

circumnavigated any of its procedures and guidelines for large-scale forestry operations. This statement stood in sharp contrast to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) statement that although the company had submitted a logging application in June 2014 and meeting for scoping, their application was still undergoing review. The difficulty in determining the extent of Chinese logging, however, also stemmed from the increasing practice of claim owners sub-leasing concentrated land holdings, or “landlordism.”

The Guyana Geology and Mines Commission (GGMC) came under further scrutiny over the controversial awarding of mining properties solely intended for Guyanese to Bai Shan Lin, a claim the mining body contested. The inception report of a Management and Systems Review of the GGMC revealed that, as of early 2015, Bai Shan Lin director Chu Hongbo was the third largest holder of medium-scale mining permits in Guyana, with 109 listed medium-scale properties and one of four people holding over 100 medium-scale permits. Notably, one individual was listed as holding over 1,500 mining claims. Mining claims also exist alongside the number of people who hold prospecting permits for medium scale in greater amounts than Hongbo. Although prospecting permits are intended only for prospecting, on the ground, mining activities are carried out. When it came to light that Hongbo had become a naturalized citizen, a scandal ensued around whether or not the government had granted citizenship in order to facilitate the company’s ventures into the mining sector. Given its parameters that small-scale or medium-scale mining was intended for Guyanese, many presumed that the corporation had cunningly circumvented the Mining Act 1989. As Janette Bulkan and John Palmer argue (2016), the revision of the Mining Act, which was intended to encourage international mining companies while safeguarding

national interest, enabled the concentration of mining concessions in hands of a small number of nationals, who acquired over 75% of small-scale and over 40% of medium-scale concessions. Further, it has facilitated the expansion of landlordism, or the renting of concessions, and the smuggling of gold with the sharp increase in the international gold price from 2006.

These reports appeared to further legitimate the APNU+ AFC coalitions' charges that the previous PPP government-led corruption would only cease with a change in political parties. As they argued, this coalition government would secure the nation against exploitative economic practices that threatened the integrity of the nation's sovereignty and re-established a form of neocolonial rule. In the midst of this platform was the matter of Amerindian rights. Underlining the political rhetoric was the argument that indigenous peoples as being victimized by a government bent on expanding extractive neoliberal development at the expense of indigenous rights and its international agreement with Norway to reduce deforestation and forest degradation. Known as the Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS) Guyana-Norway Agreement, the agreement hinges on Guyana's preservation of its rich forests, which absorbs close to three times the carbon than its neighboring countries as part of the Guiana Shield, one of the world's oldest land surfaces. As the world's second highest percentage of rainforest cover due to its expansive rainforest in the Amazon Basin in the country's southern region, it is considered a key contributor to the fight against climate change, global warming, or global carbon emissions. The state manages approximately 84% of the forests with indigenous peoples at 14%. Due to its unique geography, Guyana is one of only a few countries with forest that arrogate

more carbon than its national emissions. With funding secured from Norway, Guyana became the first country in the world to develop a Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS) to adhere to the United Nations Programme on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation (REDD+).

The aim of the Norway-Guyana Agreement included an ambitious agenda: reduce deforestation, reduce poverty, and create employment through micro and small business development for the most vulnerable sectors of the population, and strengthen the implementation of environmental regulations. Although the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Cooperative Republic of Guyana and the Government of the Kingdom of Norway outlined a robust program that would translate into the reduction of global carbon emissions, the main composition of the agreement centered on the country's "pristine forests" as its most valuable assets. This had particular implications for indigenous communities as the majority population that reside within the country's hinterland and have had traditionally used the forests for subsistence. The estimated US \$250 million in funds from Norway, facilitated through the Guyana REDD+ Investment Fund (GRIF), would go toward several projects proposed in the LCDS, including the US \$80 million for the Amaila Falls Hydro Electric Project, being developed in partnership with Sithe Global, a US-based project development firm known for building power plants, dams, refineries and other infrastructure internationally, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), and the China Development Bank. To date, the project has not officially begun, in part due to charges of corruption around Sithe Global, the fluctuating proposed costs of the project, and the lack of transparency of negotiations. In addition, the project

posed significant environmental impacts for Amerindian communities in the Upper Mazaruni region, whose lands would be inundated with flooding, necessitating the community's relocation.

Significantly, Norway funds would go toward the creation of an Amerindian Development Fund, estimated at US \$6 million through an implementation of almost 200 indigenous Amerindian villages Community Development Plans (CDPs) as part of hinterland development. In 2013, 27 community development plans were scheduled to start implementation. These policies invoked the stereotypical representation of the Amerindian subject as the natural "stewards" of the lands. Amerindian communities could opt-in to the REDD+ program and receive payments through a consultative process; however, the actual implementation of this option and what it would entail for Amerindian communities has remained unclear. Another initiative, funded through performance payments received from Norway includes the Amerindian Land Titling Project, projected to securitize Amerindian land tenure and natural resources to enable sustainable development.

Indigenous NGOs such as the APA have sharply criticized the government's project to streamline the process of titling Amerindian lands based on the Amerindian Act 2006, which has been summarily opposed by numerous Amerindian communities for its partial recognition of indigenous peoples' rights to their traditional land, territory, and natural resources. Establishing the LCDS program in a context in which indigenous rights are tenuously protected through state recognition would not only make the viability of the LCDS project's successful implementation questionable, but also potentially endorse land grabbing by the state.

In addition to predicating proposed development schemas to ensure the realization of Guyana's "green economy," environmentally sustainable ventures that would ameliorate poverty while generating employment opportunities, these policies reveal the larger political economy in which indigenous rights is situated and constrained. Depicted as a win-win situation between poor forested country and rich country, the agreement exhibits the historic unequal relations of power intrinsic to such arrangements. Although seemingly a government-to-government partnership, the agreement places significant pressure on a severely poor country to comply with its stipulations to deter from industrial and extractive development, the country's largest economic driver alongside its sugar and rice industries. In 2013 alone, Guyana exported gold worth US\$1 billion. In contrast, Norway continues to hold one of the worst carbon footprints in the world with a country of nearly 5 million people (roughly five times the population of Guyana) and no significant domestic policies to address climate change, global warming or reduce carbon emissions. This has prompted speculation that Guyana's forest had become hostage to the global lip service of powerful countries purporting to be staunch supporters of redressing climate change.

As Guyana wrestles to reconcile the contradictions of its national development ventures, environmental preservation and extractivism, which centers around the hinterland as a simultaneous space of redemption and disorder, indigenous communities remain entangled in the struggle between the nation's desire for economic advancement and sovereignty on the one hand, and powerful multinational corporations and international agendas on the other. Echoing imperial and colonial projections toward the country as an invaluable resource for expansion, the state imagines the hinterland as the final frontier to



be absorbed according to what Marjo Lindroth calls “neoliberal rationalities” (Lindroth 2014). These rationalities are apparent in consultation and capacity building initiatives geared toward full economic integration of the hinterland and its indigenous Amerindian villages, revealing what I argue is a shaping force of neoliberal subject formation as what Lindroth refers to as “biopolitical collectivities”.<sup>26</sup> This milieu in which indigenous hinterlands and bodies become central has exacerbated existing communal fragmentations and displaced village economies and communal practices, reinforce heteropatriarchal power relations and gender roles, and has rendered indigenous bodies vulnerable to exploitation, including gender and sexual violence. This chapter also points to the outlines of how this neoliberal subject formation is contested, as this fraught terrain is also the space in which indigenous peoples reproduce, contest, and disrupt attempts to reconfigure local indigenous governance structures and communal practices and vision for communal indigenous futures.

### **POULTRY FARMS, CORPORATE BODIES, AND REARING NEOLIBERAL SUBJECTS**

The speedboat roared to the boat stelling filled with passengers from further up the river, the Richards family with the typical boat captain simply known as Benji. I had learned that the Richards family had several sons that worked as boat captains carting supplies, miners, and other passengers through the river that traversed through the community to the backdam. The matriarch and patriarch of the family lived alongside their sons and daughters and their children in an elevated landing along the river where

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

speedboats worth thousands of Guyana dollars drifted at the stelling. Their son, Stephens, his wife Yvette, and their children lived at a different location in the village away from the family, in a part of the river in which they were the only residents. The village of [REDACTED] was situated along the main artery of extractive development.

Known as the ‘gold bush gateway,’ [REDACTED] was located where the dark waters of the Essequibo, Mazaruni, and Cuyuni rivers converge and diverge; overlapping river boundaries serve as highways to the backdam where speedboats, guided by skillful boat captains, traverse the river channels. Journeying to the Cuyuni-Mazaruni region had taken several hours by mini-bus and two speedboats, yet in comparison to other parts of the hinterland, it remained relatively accessible, if not inexpensive. The mythical search for the lost city of gold, *El Dorado*, chronicled in Walter Raleigh’s infamous 1596 account *Discoverie of Guiana*, indelibly marks the social imaginary of the region. Known administratively as Region 7, the Cuyuni-Mazaruni is home to the mining town of Bartica, where Creole coastlanders, Brazilians, and Amerindians alike pursue the possibility of vast wealth. After many years of observation and journeys during the rainy and dry seasons, young men draw on embodied knowledge in order to read the river’s cyclical rhythms to navigate powerful speedboats through tumultuous rapids and rocky terrain.

This labor is undeniably dangerous, as I later observed during several visits to Matuk Falls with a village boat captain and several other residents from [REDACTED], where shattered remains of boats broken up by jutting rocks and perforated and splintered wood lay abandoned in the river. A lone shop serves as a brief rest stop for boatmen carrying miners into the backdam. Long, iron boats slish through the river at much slower speeds,

emptied out grey whales filled with barrels of fuel from Bartica, to unknown destinations up the river to replenish ongoing dredge operations. This flow of traffic is interspersed with logging activities, as timber of various species are cut in uniform pieces to form a floating raft; men alternately lounge on thick logs, or stand, feet bracing the wood, while water deflected light into weathered, fatigued faces. Alongside the constant movement and humming are moments of deep silence.

Several members of the community were members of the Guyanese Organization of Indigenous Peoples, and through my own collaborative work with the organization, and the chief suggested I consider the village as key site for the research. Soon thereafter, we organized a meeting with the village toshao to discuss the research project and receive official permission. Upon receiving approval from the village council and the village toshao, Mark, I had worked with the committee to identify areas where I might contribute to the needs of the village in a concrete way. From these conversations, we agreed that I might best help the community by collecting oral histories and conducting a historiography of the community. This necessitated my close work primarily with elders and older residents in the community. I was eager to conduct the work, as this information not only provided a record for subsequent generations born in the village, but might also aid in cultural revitalization and development projects in the community.

I had been living with Yvette, a middle-aged Amerindian woman known for her “strong-headed” demeanor in the community, her son, three daughters, and husband for a few weeks now, and had been invited to partake in a village workshop. There were frequent workshops conducted in the village for capacity building by various governmental and

NGO organizations. This particular workshop would focus on the community development plan (CDP), a microcapital business that was funded by the Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS). Over the course of the next several days, I took part in several of the workshops conducted in the village and in the neighboring village similarly constructing their community development plan. I quickly realized that the implementation of the CDP plan revealed several points. The first is that these workshops revealed an unsurprisingly importation of micro-financial capital ventures that sought to promote economic self-sufficiency and the integration of hinterland communities as part of a national plan to encourage entrepreneurial capacities among everyday Guyanese. Secondly, it revealed how the “village body” was rendered analogous to a corporate body, in which members of this collective village body were expected to adopt and perform beliefs and practices that would enable the success of the proposed CDP plans, as “a struggle of the self.” Finally, it demonstrates how these projects exacerbated existing divisions within the community and how the labor of women, although pivotal to the success of the community projects, was rendered invisible.

Earlier that morning the toshao had called for a village meeting to assemble all of the residents at the pavilion located at the first landing in the river where one of the churches was located. Every Sunday and several times during the week, I would watch a speedboat collect churchgoers from their respective stellingings before speeding down the river to the church landing, the long hair of female passengers streaming in wind. It was heavily attended, and I had been eagerly welcomed when I had attended church services to introduce myself. The pavilion was interspersed with faces I had just begun to be familiar

with by the time we arrived. A tall, thin Indian looking man with a smaller, Amerindian woman with a warm smile, stood to the side selling *phoulourie*, cake, water, and soda drinks from two red and white coolers to several children impatiently waiting their turn to order.

The pavilion, along with a smaller Amerindian benab, was the only building that bordered the field where the village football (soccer) and cricket teams practiced under the overbearing sun. The field was lined with thick-forested trees, and to the left of the pavilion was an almost indiscernible pathway that I later learned led to an large cassava farm that Aunty Edridge, the toshao's mother, along with other family members tended to in the early morning hours before the sun made the already arduous labor unbearable. I greeted a few familiar faces as I awkwardly climbed the bleachers to find a seat that would afford me a better view of the meeting. I smiled shyly at Natalie, one of Benji's daughters. She was sitting with her cousins, all of who were roughly between the ages of 18-25. I had tried my hand at the village women's cricket team a few days before, awkwardly wielding the wide paddle cricket bat before dashing back and forth along the narrow dirt strip with my teammate, racking up a few additional points for our team. Curiously, they had asked me one afternoon why I was unmarried at my age, much less without children of my own. They were intrigued by a student conducting ethnographic research, traveling to various communities, and doing what essentially translated to "deep living" with community members.

Natalie worked as a schoolteacher at the primary school on the "island," what many considered a crucial part of the village life, where the health post and the school were

located. Quite literally an island, it was shared with the teacher's residences and a village council member and his family. From my host family's location on the river, I had a direct view of the bustling activity on the miniature island as parents and older siblings made their way to the island, alternately in small speedboats or expertly paddling perched children in dugout canoes.

Dressed in a green American Eagle shirt Mark stood from the lower bleachers and with legs shoulder width apart, called to order the village meeting. The joking conversation behind me lulled to a silence as the meeting commenced. Before we continue with today's meeting, he told us, "Let's begin with an opening prayer, followed by the national pledge." Voices around me dutifully murmured in unison the pledge, as I stood in silence before returning to my seat at its conclusion. Mark thanked the residents present at the meeting for taking the time to come to the day's workshop, "which is very important for our development." Nodding to two men organizing items, he said, "They're here to discuss our CDP project... I'll let Mr. McCormack introduce the team proper."

The wiry bald black man, whom he introduced as Mr. McCormack, wore wire-rimmed glasses, a burgundy polo shirt and slacks. With an air of practiced ease, he unfolded a compact tripod, calmly extending the legs before fitting onto it a large white flipchart. At Mark's nod to go ahead, he launched straight into his well-rehearsed presentation. "We're here to have some open discussion on your CDP," he began. The village he explained would be receiving a grant of 5 million (GYD) "to boost your village economy and create a plan to be invested into some kind of economic profit." He explained to us that part of his team's work—he gestured toward his companion and rocked forward on his toes, as he

firmly nodded his head up at us—included visiting close to 160 Amerindian communities housed in the Ministry of Indigenous Affairs. “Do you know where that is?” He asked blithely. Not waiting for a response beyond the few nodding heads, he continued. “The name has changed with the elections, with the project manager of the team is Abraham Khan. We are here to help you with marketing of your project, which is developed with our partner, the UNDP which deals with the financial aspect. With accountability and things of that aspect.” He crossed his arms, the marker he grabbed moments before pointing toward us. “Part of our support is to provide more technical support.”

He mentioned the projects he had assisted other communities in developing, such poultry farms and cassava cultivation. “We want to help you develop a business venture...you want the big picture.” He reiterated. “The project is funded through LCDS, anybody heard of it before?” A former councilwoman, an elder that had brought me cassava bread as a welcome to the community, raised her hand to my left. “Yes, Lenora,” Mark called softly. Promptly she stated, almost robotically, “It’s a strategy to develop the country and preserve the environment at the same time.” The workshop facilitator shook his head vigorously in agreement and appeared to be impressed. The jargon surrounding the numerous projects for Amerindian communities and so-called hinterland development often posed significant challenges for a shared understanding as it was presumed that the brief consultation workshops conducted by various officials adequately explained the objectives and implications for the community. This was often not the case.

“Yes, so Guyana said look, because we have all this forest, we’ll preserve it. Ever hear of the expression, ‘the forests are languages of Earth’?” He smiled expectantly. I

glanced around surreptitiously, most of the attendees watching him keenly. I caught the eye of the health worker, who stifled a laugh at my expression. I turned back to the front. “We are making a *sacrifice* in terms of economics for not chopping down the forest. The forest is providing a service. The forests of Guyana provide a payment for the services our project provide.” He touched his chest to emphasize his meaning. “One of the projects is the ADF [Amerindian Development Fund] where every project must be a community venture called CDP, being implemented under FPIC. Anybody know what that is?” No one, except the toshao raised a hand.

Undeterred, he resumed his presentation. “FPIC means Free Prior and Informed Consent—anyone coming in has to inform you, beforehand, and get your consent. That’s why we have asked for a public meeting...it is the residents that decide the project you want to implement.” He clarifies that part of the project involves the establishment of a community management team (CMT) comprised of 6-8 members to run the project. The team would also be responsible for reporting back to the village council and ultimately the village community. “Members must be able to report finances and how much received and produced.” He stops suddenly and lets out a sigh. The deluge of information being tossed had caused tension to seep between my eyes. There was little to no in depth discussion with the attendees about the clarity of the presentation or whether or not the proposed organizational framework for the project aligned with the community’s own vision for project implementation.

“Let’s do a little game to get everyone to talk. You know, sometimes we come and talk, present, and when we get back to the office someone would say ‘man, I didn’t



understand or agree with that man’.” I hear someone chuckle to my left. He demonstrated for us an icebreaker game, called “Kiss the Baby.” Holding up an imaginary baby, he proclaimed aloud that he would place a kiss on the ear of the baby, with the object of the game being for each participant to kiss a part of the baby that had not been kissed by another person. Over the next ten minutes, the baby is passed around. While some embrace the game wholeheartedly, others look around uncertainly before kissing the baby, and others laugh outright at the absurdity of the game.

“So, let’s return to the CDP plan! Let’s hear your input. Right now, you don’t know what would work. But, remember, this project must make money. Why is this important?” McCormack clapped his hands together and after a beat offered his own rationale for the import of the project. “You can make your own money and don’t have to wait on grants. You go into business to make money. Employment is a secondary offset. Your primary concern is to make a *profit*.” He says, barely pausing for breath. I glance around again curious as to how his belabored point of profitability was being received. The workshop had yet to actually begin. I notice a few folks with their heads propped on their chin and others whispering to their neighbors. He nodded seemingly satisfied that his point has been made. “I’m gonna ask the toshao to give an update on the CDP.”

Mark stands and cursorily summarizes in a previous meeting that the village had opted to change its initial plans from poultry rearing to a village shop. “We have miners coming through the village and poultry would have been feasible when the companies were here, but they’ve left.”

“—Which companies?” McCormack interjects.

“We had Barama and Guyana Saw Mills... so, there were all logging type businesses.” He explains. These companies had been the main employer for residents living along the river and had incited a wave of migration to and settlement in the area by Creole coastlanders and Amerindians. When the companies closed, residents of the village resorted to work further inland, in mining areas in the backdam. As one Amerindian man in the village shared with me, he had worked with one of the larger multinational mining companies. He left when he realized that the pay was significantly lower than working on a “small man’s” mining concession. The exorbitantly high price of food, water, and other basic necessities had also seen the steady loss of the money he worked diligently to save and bring home “as the man.”

McCormack asked Mark basic questions about the village composition. As a key facilitator of the implementation of the CDP in Amerindian villages, his lack of knowledge about the particularity of the village mimicked the governmental approach to Amerindian development through a homogenous framework.

“What about the village here? What’s the population?”

“We have approximately 450 people.”

“What average size of families?”

“About 7-9 persons.” As we watched the exchange between McCormack and Mark, a side conversation ensued about the plausible amount of chicken consumed on average. “About 15 pounds, three chickens for the week,” a man murmurs to another. They were calculating the amount an average family might consume. “Yea, but you looking at it from

the consumption aspect. What about production aspect?” Another a man in a highlighter shirt asks.

Overhearing the murmured remarks, the second workshop coordinator, a thin Indian man who referred to himself as Uncle Wally, turns to the flipchart and quickly scrawls the calculations for 1, 080 birds/month at \$500 GYD/lb. I grimace at the price, noting the significantly high price in contrast to price of chicken sold in coastal communities.

“—But the price most people pay is from Bartica at \$340/lb.,” Vivian, a health worker and the wife of Benji interrupts. I noted that the men—the workshop facilitators and village attendees, had dominated much of the conversation until that point. There was a temporary lull as the realization sinks in that the community would not only need to compete with other villages venturing into poultry rearing, but also with the nearby mining town of Bartica, where chicken was conveniently available to miners and other workers already in town to purchase supplies, fuel, and equipment. The community would also need to aggressively market to consumers in order to make its business known to passing travelers.

Another person suggests placing a signboard at the main river landing of the village to generate customers. Uncle Wally stands again to draw five boxes on the notepad, one empty. “One empty for where the money goes,” He jokes, which receives a few chuckles. “No, no, for cleaning and sanitation of one pen, and the rest for holding the chickens for two weeks before moving them back to the pen,” He says sternly. “If you don’t do the right ‘ting you’ll get the wrong ‘ting.” He slips easily into Creolese. The right thing he illustrates

through a money sign symbol and the wrong thing a large black arrow facing downward. The site selection for the pen construction must be carefully considered, he explains. It must have access to water, [and] be on level, clear land. “Your pen must be built in such a way to allow ventilation...it’s the same thing with these birds. Do the right ‘ting.’” When the chickens are comfortable, it reduces the rate of mortality and the risk of any bacterial infection that could easily fell an entire batch of chickens. “Your pen orientation should be east to west, for the sun.” He turned around to gauge our comprehension before turning back the notepad. He expertly sketched the dimension of the chicken pen, and then tapped his pen on top of the notepad. “Don’t hold back on this,” he cautioned. “You can cut the cost on the roof by using thatch or zinc.” He paused, placed the cap back on his pen. “This is just to give you an idea to decide on the project, but at least before you do a project you must know what it entails.” Several village residents raised chicken for subsistence purposes, yet the relatively high price in comparison to chicken in Bartica, ensured that it remained a small-scale venture. As McCormack assured them, the workshop would make them knowledgeable about the necessary components of commercial business—management, marketing, and accounting. When members of the community suggested that the community might primarily benefit, as folks would no longer need to travel outside the community for poultry, McCormack encouraged them, “think bigger.”

Over the course of the next hour the facilitators engage attendees in a discussion about the village shop, its potential strengths and weaknesses and the capacity for the community to generate an income. The shop would again have to sell items at comparable prices to Bartica in order to appeal to its potential customers, including the village

residents, the school-feeding program at the primary school, and miners and loggers. McCormack warns them that in his experience most village shops in Amerindian communities have poor success rates. “It’s management,” he states simply, “That’s the issue. We’ll help you by giving you forms for accounting. Once a plan is in place, a CDO [community development officer] will be assigned to come visit every month to make sure you are on track.” He draws a grid with four labels to aid the village in deciding whether to pursue the village shop or chicken rearing plan. In bold, he writes “Strengths, Weakness, Opportunity, Threats.” Some villagers point out that the project might help young people develop business and management skills while supporting the self-sufficiency of the community. Mark adds that it might also “create a sense of belonging,” where village members have a sense of pride and community around being able to support each other, and that money generated through the village could be redirected toward some of the community groups, such as the fishing, logging, and sewing groups that villagers had created.

McCormack nodded in agreement and encouraged residents to speak aloud any other potential disadvantages as he jotted them under each respective category. Residents called aloud their points: the lack of village support, lack of honesty/need for training, poor management, and the reliance on “credit” instead of cash. The latter prompted McCormack to add, “See, this involves changing people’s behaviors to capitalize on opportunity. You have to pursue it; it won’t come to you. If you’re not careful, you’ll do *busyness* instead of *business*.” His words revealed how the discussion around potential disadvantages and weaknesses remained relegated to the local level and not to the broader political economy

that situated indigenous local economies as occupying a space of *lack*. It also pointed to the fact that resources and ideas about hinterland and Amerindian development traveled from the coast inland, and never the other way around. The threats list was more expansive, ranging from the potential for dishonesty, slow sales, and underpricing of goods to “security.” “The market looks more favorable where the chickens are concerned,” he surmised, as he stood back and looked over the list.

It had begun to rain, and sounded like a thousand little rattling cans being dropped on the zinc roof. As such, it was increasingly difficult to hear any of the ongoing conversations toward the front. Turning back to us, he clapped his hands again and suggested that we take a break before making a final decision. I breathed deeply, my head swimming from the whirlwind of information. I looked around at the wary faces that mirrored my own. The group of young women to my left eagerly descended the stairs to head to the shop to buy soft drinks. I glimpsed several others hurrying across the field to a thin path that led to the outhouse. When I turned back, McCormack had settled onto the bleachers next to me talking to Roy, another former village toshao who was gesturing in the distance, to the left of the field and beyond the farm. “There is a rasta man living back there where Barama used to be. A rasta man that has conflict with we because he claim he acquired that area before our land title began.” He shook his head in frustration and recounted how he had cursed out several village residents in the past. They had taken the matter to the Ministry, yet the conflict had yet to be resolved.

Suddenly swiveling in my direction, he outstretched his hand. Somewhat belatedly I shook his hand before he asked, “So...what’s your role in the community.” Something in

his tone made me balk, and I asked plainly, “What do you mean?” Flustered, he tried again. “I mean, are you from the village?” I shook my head and told him that I was there as part of a research project on indigenous land rights and its relationship to “Amerindian development.” I added that my family hailed from the Northwest region. I was conscious of the quieted conversations around us, and the curious glances we were receiving about his familiar approach to me. Seeming to believe that he could confide in me, he lowered his voice. “There’s a lot of hand holding,” he nodded. “We have to get them to see beyond what’s there.” His comment disturbed me. My privileged position as “researcher” and “outsider” seemed to signal to him a shared paternalistic view of Amerindian incapacity and lack and presumed role in imparting guidance toward their necessary development.

Oblivious to my discomfort, he described to me the teams’ overall objectives at the initial stages of the LCDS project. “Part of the team conducted the implementation phase of the project, where we had 26 villages form part of the stages... Barabina Hill was actually part of the pilot.” My curiosity piqued that my familiar community had been selected as part of the pilot, I asked him about a rumor I had heard circulating throughout the village, that the new coalition government had unceremoniously ended a funding program—called community service officers (CSOs)—that trained youth in various avenues. “How are CSO’s different from the CDO’s that will be appointed from the village?”

He sighed and shifted in his seat, his tone still low, as he explained to me that CSOs emerged as part of the LCDS project “specifically geared toward youth to give them training and experience in exchange for stipend payments.” The project was scrapped when its widespread “mismanagement” came to light. “What do you mean by mismanagement?”

I asked. He hesitated and glanced around. I quickly realized that his hesitancy stemmed from the fact that the village was considered supporters of the recently ousted PPP party. “There had been uses of the CSO’s for other functions beyond what was specified in the project...for *political* means under the former government. They became *politicized* and used to spread the government’s agenda.” Handing me his card, he told me to contact him if I needed any help traveling to other communities. He nodded, then made his way to the front of the pavilion again to explain that the community would need to sign a “micro-capital grant agreement,” a contract agreement that the funds would be used for the agreed upon development plan. People began to collect their things, correctly sensing that the technical formalities meant the impending conclusion of the workshop.

I was not surprised by his assessment of the project, as this had been a critique echoed by indigenous leaders from other villages and informed the coalition government’s campaign for “change” against what they considered the endemic corruption that had spread throughout the country. As with many of the charges of corruption, real and imagined, it was tangled up with in racialized lens—making it difficult to distinguish facts. Rather, it was the presumption that Amerindian peoples (including the present community) were mere pawns in a contentious and racialized political landscape without their own critical assessments, political interventions, and strategic engagements with the government. As Stephens had explained to me one evening during the family meal of cassava and kuma kuma fish, underlining the political stance of each party, regardless of the party one supported, was the idea “that we can’t speak for ourselves. They just think



we ‘buck people. They [the coalition government] trying to search out this politician, that politician for corruption, and we just *dey* [there].”

### **PROFITABILITY AND SEEING BEYOND THE VILLAGE**

The following day, I was invited to join members of the proposed community development management team—this included several members of the current and previous village council, and a few youth from the community that they believed might benefit from the training. We departed in the early morning mist, the gloomy clouds overhead threatening to drench us before our arrival. Warily, I recalled the stinging, suffocating sensation of rain being whipped into our faces during a speedboat ride to the market the previous day. Fortunately, [REDACTED] was a neighboring village, no more than a fifteen-minute boat ride away. It was a village where many of the homes were centrally located near the riverfront, rather than spread along the river.

The toshao of [REDACTED], Laura was a middle-aged Amerindian woman that greeted us warmly. She ushered us to a small building where we would be holding the workshop with the same facilitators, McCormack and Uncle Wally, and began circulating a clipboard to collect our names and village affiliation. Villagers from the [REDACTED] community also joined the workshop. The small room quickly became cramped and muggy. The door was left ajar, though no wind passed through the glass shutter windows. There were two long wooden conference tables and we quickly settled down to begin the workshop, as we were beginning late. McCormack, looking cool in his white wrinkle-free T-shirt began by welcoming us to the “mini-business training” where over the course of the next several

hours he would review with us key business skills, with marketing identified as the most crucial component. Laura invites us to stand as she gave a brief prayer that the training would be well received and that the communities would “make the best use of the funds...if you enter into a business venture, you must make a profit in order to use the funds to develop our village.” After a collective *amen*, McCormack welcomed the group the start of a rigorous day of training that would help prepare the community to enter the world of business, beginning with a brief summary of the needs of each respective community in building their respective capacities to manage and become leaders adept at anticipating and warding off potential challenges that might derail the project’s profitability.

“ [REDACTED] finally settled on poultry and [REDACTED] on renting a tractor,” McCormack began in his usual confident and measured tone. “Both communities still have research to do with [REDACTED] deciding on what kind of tractor and [REDACTED] working on an estimate for the poultry farm.” Directing us to a thick manual, he encourages teachers and nurses in the community to become knowledgeable of its contents. The unspoken assumption being that these sectors of the village had received a formal educational training and would be most adept at learning and teaching the material to other less formally educated villagers. “As a member of a management team you are automatically a leader and everyone has a role on the team.” He invites us to give brief introductions. There are several farmers, former council members and toshaos, teachers, and health workers.

“These business ventures will only be successful as long as you maintain interest from the village.” He urged the management team to share financial information with the village council and mentioned off the cuff that he had witnessed toshaos not

communicating to villages where funds were being allocated. Transparency and accountability would stave off the threat of corruption and unsustainability. Underlining his insistence appeared to be the thinly veiled suggestion that indigenous peoples were more susceptible to these threats; ironically, this idea presented the national arena as a neutral zone even as it made invisible the pervasive culture that plagued politics and the government.

He writes “start-up” and implementation across the board at the front of the room, emphasizing the importance of “birthing” the business, which he likened to the birth of a baby. “Think of the things/activities involved in getting a baby,” he chuckled. The startup activities tend to be behind the scenes and the things a woman must do to “get baby,” he explained. “What happens in the dark will eventually come to the light.” Amid the chuckles his analogy drew, he makes the parallels clearer. “Making a business requires a good start up plan because it’ll affect the implementation.” The comparison between sexual activities, women’s reproductive bodily labor, and business struck me as an odd comparison. “It’s good, unless she has an abortion,” a man interjects. McCormack chuckles and nods his head, conceding his symbolic, if rough correlation between terminating a pregnancy and terminating a project. The analogy of the Amerindian village as the woman’s body birthing the “baby” business that might be “aborted” revealed not only the gendered ascription of the village, insofar as it signaled a moment of female power to make an autonomous concerning her body, but also a moment of heteropatriarchal loss of control. It also revealed the larger power dynamics that were out of the communities’ hand.

McCormack then guides the group through the necessary questions and areas to consider in creating a startup. He prompts them, telling them to shout aloud other crucial points to consider in creating a sustainable business venture. Several people proclaim that resources, finance, and the availability and location are crucial aspects to consider in developing a startup. One of the few cassava farmers in the community stands to reiterate the need to consider the profitability of the start up. Rebecca, another farmer in the community interjects, “How this will benefit the community, the village?” Silence descended as other workshop participants nod their heads solemnly in agreement. The toshao of ██████ ponders aloud: “How long will the market be available?” Frowning, McCormack maintains his narrative of the workshop: “Think beyond the capacity of your villages to *see*...they might see your vision which depends on your ability to guide your followers. It means you have to show information, to share,” He emphasizes. Another village member of ██████ returns to the point of creating and sustaining interest. “—Not only interest...but ownership. If people are not interested or own their ideas, they won’t buy in,” the toshao adds. “While we’re thinking of the positives, we must think of negative, the advantages and disadvantages,” another villager adds, the sunbeams tattoo on his neck stark against his light blue shirt.

The workshop progresses as the facilitator attempts to draw out information about the implementation phase of the project, which include procurement, services/management, land preparation, and construction. “You can apply this to any business, from simple farming and gardening to big business,” he remarks over his shoulder, as he continues to solicit ideas from the group. He scrawls **SUSTAINED**, bold

and underlined. “One thing to remember is that you don’t have to pay this back, it’s a grant. You should behave as if you do,” he advised. Uncle David, one of the few black residents in the village, wiped sweat from his brow, chimes in. “You have to change the mindset, as if it is a loan... to change behavior.” “The mountain can’t come to you, you have to go to them,” the toshao nods satisfactorily.

Unexpectedly McCormack stops in the middle of his sentence to ask, “What is entrepreneurship?” After a long pause, a man who looks to be in his early thirties and is seated at the front of the room offers, “Be proactive, but don’t just sit and dictate.” “Yes,” he agrees. “You must know your tool inside and out.” He picks up his pen and drops it on his manual. “Your meeting is like your weapon...it’s your most important tool.” His analogy between village meetings as a weapon to advancing the agenda of economic development reminds me of his earlier comments about the community management project as spearheading development for the betterment of the village. He picks up his red pen methodically bulleting the behaviors associated with entrepreneurial leadership: (1) Taking calculated risks; (2) Always looking to take advantage of opportunities; (3) Taking personal responsibility; (4) Anticipating change in attempts to maintain control of the business; (5) Seeking ways to overcome challenges to your business. There is collective silence as people hurriedly jot down each point. The discourses of the workshop revealed the broader imperative of Amerindian development, of reshaping indigenous political subjectivities as neoliberal citizens and collective partners in the expansion of neoliberal development. Rather than view the communal village as a hindrance to the neoliberal expansion, the collective body is rendered as an “economic unit.” This reshaping is one

that can only be obtained through the struggle with the self, as McCormack explains further, through a adoption of behaviors that will enable an individual and collective transformation that would lead to self-sufficiency and a greater self-determination.

“OK, entrepreneurial leadership, you’re all leading because you’re getting into business. But who are these people you’re organizing?” I can hear several murmurs referring to the village around the room. Rebecca exclaims aloud: “Honest people!” There is a suspended moment, before laughter breaks out around the room. McCormack laughs along with everyone before holding up his hand. “Yes, but the first and foremost thing on your mind is not the village. Your priority is *to make a profit*. You can’t help a soul if you don’t make a profit, everything else is secondary. Again, it is this thing about behavior,” He shifts his weight forward, his pen slicing the air with every word, then strolls the length of the room. He recounts the example of how ██████ had years ago received chicken and feed from the WWF program which he described as a “gamble” venture. “—No, it was an opportunity that they took advantage of,” an older woman laughs. “No—it was an advantage of a common goal, but it wasn’t a common goal with leadership,” the toshao says wryly.

“Don’t just take risks to your market...you have an advantage. You have a direct link to the government,” he states. His comment suggested that indigenous peoples had a unique relationship vis-a-vis the national government that translated to advantage, but elided the fact that it was this very relationship, based on recognition that had placed indigenous communities in a position of dependency on the good will of the government in the first place.

Mark interjected, pointing out that generating community involvement in the project was difficult due to the lack of immediacy of monetary return. “What you have is the youths are not interested in the CDP. We sought to give them roles and responsibilities, but even with the chicken rearing, youth are not interested.” “We would meet with them and get some ideas, especially with the youths... and we would do a feasibility study to see which project most likely to work for the profit of the CDP. We don’t have many people completing secondary school, because of their financial situation,” Natalie stated worriedly. She suggested the need to include them in the project and incorporate their ideas in order to create a link between existing business ventures and their ideas. Youth involvement was critical to the viability of the project, as many of the members of the village were involved in mining and farming, and as such, youth remained the available group for sustaining the project. McCormack readily agreed that youth, especially women were central to the future of the project.

“You’re going to struggle with yourself initially... that will happen in trying to apply business behavior to your life, you’re gonna experience a change, a struggle. You’re not accustomed to doing it, you’re gonna struggle. Not with the knowledge you’re not accustomed to holding yourself accountable... it’s not about knowledge necessarily.” He said.

McCormack stands at the front of the room with his hand on his hip and the other under his chin, striking a pose of deep thought. “Isn’t it behavior, Shanya?” He asks. I am slightly startled, not expecting the direct question and I scramble for a response. I was increasingly uncomfortable with his presumption that I aligned with his ideas about

reshaping individual behavior to align with the rational neoliberal market logic. “I think that it’s different,” I begin. “—Different?” he asks. “Yes, you’re speaking of a business model and not necessarily what is happening in the community,” I offer. “Hmm, different,” he repeats quizzically. He turns back to his writing pad without further comment. Column by column, we review the sample cashbook document in the manual. For the next hour, he meticulously details how to record transactions, randomly selecting participants to record the information.

The form he explained was very important to the implementation of the project in terms of maintaining accountability for the UNDP. “Shanya, talk to them now they making life hard,” he exclaimed jokingly. I chuckled along with the rest of the group, yet felt increasing discomfort at being singled out during the workshop as a translator of appropriate rationalities conducive to development. He concluded with a review of the final document in the folders he had handed out earlier, affirming the need to maintain diligent financial records for the project.

The conversation at the end of the workshop was animated, with members of the management team discussing the potential benefits of the project for fostering a more self-sufficient village, drawing in the energy of the youth, and assisting the community in developing a vision of development that had the village interests as its core basis. Despite McCormack’s insistence that the priority of the workshop was first and foremost the generation of profit, the community members maintained that the project had to align with the best interests of the village, as a communal initiative. I realized that the homogenous rigid developmental model that was being carried to various villages was not only being



contested, but also strategically used in order to facilitate the community's vision of *communal livelihood*. Yet, the difficulties of implementing a neoliberal development model that portrayed Amerindian villages as corporate bodies placed increasing strain on relationships within the community and its own decision-making governance structures. This became readily apparent at the community's village council meeting a few days after the training, where they would need to assemble their management team and construct their proposal and implementation of the project. The gendered dynamics became apparent, as the overwhelming majority of attendees were women of the community.

“Kyap...I hear people kyapping still in the village,” Eric suggests. Kyap, or village “self-help,” entailed communal work or labor followed by a celebration with food and drink, usually traditional Amerindian drink made from cassava, or *pywari*. We had convened in the waiting area outside of the health post. It was a rectangular porch, with two opposing benches covered in weathered cushioned leather that felt suctioned to the back of my thighs. The zinc roof awning overhead rattled as a bird crash-landed.

“Leh we be fair to the village...leh we ask someone in the village,” he adds. Mark was taking notes on a propped up flip chart. They were discussing who would be the supplier of the materials for the poultry pen. Brenda suggested they consider her father, since he had access to a large speedboat to transport the materials. The toshao nodded, barely glanced up from the notepad.

Mark said that as a group it was important to create a work plan that could be broken down according to the week and who would be responsible for the chickens during each period. “The estimate from 2011 don't have slaughter house, don't have knife to cut the

chicken or a bucket for cleaning up,” Uncle David quickly flipped through the thick packet of paper the facilitator had provided as a guide for constructing their own budget proposal. He suggested they hire a contractor of the building “because you know how people stay,” He said wryly. His suggestion pointed to an underlying tension around entrusting a member of the village with the project or hiring a person from outside the community. His concern was related to ensuring accountability. “—No, we don’t want no contractor like that,” Brenda said firmly.

Wendy joined in, “The person purchasing the equipment in town is buying everything...zinc, and every thing they should put on the steamer.” She was referring to the steamer that traveled daily from Georgetown, before stopping in Parika and continuing to Bartica. The expense of the materials would be a significant cost due to transportation cost

“Whoever go to collect the chicken from Parika got to leave early and come up by speedboat, because steamer cyan [can’t] work,” Uncle David drawls out. He explained how the facilitator had reduced his proposed costs for transportation expenses. “He must think he in town then, because that cost cheap in town, not this side.” A tired-looking woman rocking her baby next to me asks directly. “And the next thing here, who gonna be responsible for the pen when it build?” Several heads nod, but no decision is made as the toshao turns the conversation toward finalizing the logistics of purchasing and transporting equipment. The conversation quickly dissolves into a sharp critique of the workshop facilitators, who were not cognizant of the particular challenges the community faced due

to its location as a riverine community. This became apparent in reviewing what the facilitator had advised in terms of material and specialized care of the chickens.

“He ain’t say creek water instead of the river water?” She asks again. During the workshop the uncertainty of whether or not the river water was too contaminated to sustain the chickens had never been resolved. “Well, he don’t know...how me duck and chicken living?” Uncle David points out. “And where I’m gonna get creek water?” The community had already decided to place the pen on the island, which was surrounded by the Cuyuni River. “He don’t even know a zinc roof cheaper than a thatch!” He exclaimed. “He a old time coolie man,” Mark remarks. The group bursts into raucous laughter at his use of the term “coolie” to refer to the Indian facilitator. The term invoked the racialized image of the backward indentured laborer. Sighing in exasperation, Brenda reminds the group again of the core focus of the plan. “This is a *village* thing people.” Several head nod again and I can sense the increasing frustration and fatigue around the discussion. Many of these challenges had not been discussed, much less posed as an initial challenge during the CDP meeting with the project coordinators and nor had it been preempted at the business training workshop.

“OK, let’s think about marketing.” Mark suggests as it writes in bold and underlines marketing on the flip chart. One of the women suggests that one of the village boat captains could spread the word with miners and take orders for the community. Insistent now, Roy, who that had previous experience working on development projects over the years in the village brought the topic back to the question of whether caretakers of the chicken would be expected to work on a voluntary basis or pay. “That’s why you give a stipend, not a

salary...ain't nobody gonna work for free!" His concerns revealed the tension of the very real conditions of poverty in the community and the immediacy of material needs for community members. The development project would take several weeks, even months before any substantial return would be generated for the community.

"Leh we do the self-help first, then if not we decide what fa' do," Brenda insists. Shaking his head the elder laments that the k'yap will not work. "People wan' pay!" Brenda and several other women remind him how many of the women had done self-help plenty of times to clear the ball field. He concedes their point with a nod of his head, but reminds them that this is a development project worth millions of dollars.

"I know you say self-help, but dem people on the hill will come. Dem people down there, dem men gon drink and then lay down 'pon the work!" Although we collectively laughed at his exaggerated gestures as he pointed to opposing ends of the river, his comment also revealed internal power relations that had become exacerbated by the challenges of the development venture alongside heightened racial and political tensions in the community due to the recent national and village council elections.

## **ENVISIONING INDIGENOUS FUTURES**

When we returned from the short speedboat ride across the river, I asked Yvette about the concerns several folks had expressed during the meeting that certain parts of the village would not wish to take part in the k'yap. She shifted the skirt that she was decorating in her lap for the upcoming village heritage celebration. She was designing several of the traditional-inspired costumes for the six girls that had volunteered to compete in the

pageant. From my position on the floor, I watched her carefully glue the last red and black bead on the top edge, before placing the dripping glue gun on the table. She explained that part of the village did not often participate in the village projects partly because of the mentality “what’s in it for me?” She looked at me intently before choosing her next words. “See this pageant thing, I think children should be never negative with these things; it’s nothing bad. Sometimes people don’t like their daughters to take part of certain things...part of it is because of the church thing.” Her voice rose increasingly as she became more agitated.

She explained that some of the girl’s parents had pulled them from the competition because of “a set of rumor” around how the girls would be sponsored. I had quickly learned that for some of the girls were sponsored by a family member that worked as a boat captain, which generated a significant amount of money in comparison to the precarious employment of other village work. Yvette proclaimed incredulously, “So what... we girl children must stay *shame* in a corner?” Her own eldest daughter had participated in the regional competition and had landed in a top placement. She was helping her secure funding through potential sponsorships from mining companies in Bartica in order to pay for the cost of her gown and traditional wear, including her transportation to Georgetown where the national Amerindian Heritage Pageant would occur for the upcoming heritage month. “It’s good for parents to see they child and feel proud. The organizing and planning shouldn’t be about payment; it’s about the *village*,” she said vehemently.

She returned to the village development project to explain to me that many of the young people, “especially the young men,” preferred to generate fast money through

mining and going to work in the backdam. I mentioned to her how the newly elected village council had an unprecedented amount of youth on the council, including the reappointed toshao. I had been shocked to learn that he was barely twenty-five years old. She nodded in agreement. “You have some of the young people getting more involved, and this is what we need, more of the young people carrying the village forward.” I sifted through the bag of feathers and beads she had recycled from previous pageants, before placing a few on the table next to her. She returned to strategically gluing beads on the fringe skirt made from dried tibusiri fiber and ité palm. We settled into a comfortable silence before she pointed to the skirt that I was decorating from my own traditional wear as a dancer for the heritage event. “You know a lot of young people are losing the culture.” She said. I paused and waited for her to continue. “You’re mixed and you hold onto your Amerindian culture. You have a majority of young people that *shame* of where they come from, of their heritage. But we need them to remember our traditions and the history of this place and where we come from... We don’t even know much of the language, except some of the elders.” She lamented. “But you say it with pride, I admire that. Dem mixed ones would say they everything else. Buck and coolie. Buck and black. They would say dey is not Amerindian.” She shook her head.

Part of me wanted to explain that part of the reason had to do with the difficulties of laying claim to an identity against exhausting charges of inauthenticity. Several “black buck” men in the village had relayed to me the challenges of having grown up as one of the few identifiably black and Amerindian peoples in the village. Grappling with how to relay my own experience to her, I stopped short when she began to describe the daily

challenges the youth faced in particular. Many of the newly elected council members, with the exception of two council members, were under the age of 25. Yvette's own daughter had been elected deputy toshao by the village, which she hoped would expose her to life outside of the village. Most of the children in the community would not complete secondary (high school level) education due to travel expense to the nearest school in Bartica and even further to Georgetown, if students wanted to pursue higher education or any vocational training. The young men became caught up in "idleness" and the lifestyle surrounding the mining—sporting. "They come out and spend they little gold money, only to go back and do it again." She mentioned the dangers of working in the backdam, where drug and gun trafficking were common and the changed mentality some men underwent once they began bringing in significant amounts of gold. Men disappeared or were outright murdered by other men, "all for money." She shook her head before sharing the difficulties women in the community faced.

Many of the young girls "get taken advantage of" and don't pursue their education, she explained. Instead, they became dependent on their partner for support. "Before you know it, they belly big. Or they get pushed into working in the backdam." I looked up from my skirt when I realized she had lowered her voice. "You hear about girls being trafficked. Some.... a few in the village, go and pick fare." On the time she had traveled with her husband topside, she had witnessed how the women were treated. "I seen little, *little* girls up there. Guyanese women, and a lot from Venezuela side too...Women does have it worse than men." While "outsiders" rendered Amerindian women vulnerable to particular forms

of exploitation” she also pointed to intra-communal domestic violence and sexual violence in the community.

She sighed deeply. “We got to *try*, yeah. We got to *push* weself.” Her reference to “push oneself” and, as I had heard on other occasions, “push ya’ body,” bespoke the profound desire for better communal economic and social livelihood and the longing for *Amerindian* futures. It also spoke to the tensions between on the one hand, securing immediate material needs and on the other, envisioning a distinct notion of development. The latter of which constantly rubbed up against the state’s imperative of hinterland and Amerindian integration through the creation of semi-autonomous corporate village bodies—villages to which the state recognized as titled collective lands, yet relegated responsibility of its realization to the community. If the project failed, and many of the community development projects had, the state could legitimately argue that despite its best efforts to train indigenous peoples and curb any behaviors not conducive to its success, indigenous people that could not perform this ideal neoliberal subjectivity had internalized their inability to perform and master these civilizing discourses as lack and inadequacy.

Despite the early challenges the chicken-rearing project, she remained hopeful and expressed that the community could use the project as an opportunity to create employment in the village and generate other projects that would attract youth involvement and begin to alleviate extreme poverty while also allowing for the creation of a community center. Elders would be able to teach the next generation some of the languages and traditional crafts. Sheepishly, she admitted that while it was a lot to hope for from the project, it would be a first step toward improving the community’s well being, an expansive understanding



that had particular ramifications for the lives of Amerindian women and girls. The following section examines how the economic marginalization and displacement of village economies stems from the precarity of the protections afforded by their recently acquired communal land title.

### **ON PRECARIOUS LAND IN THE GOLD BUSH**

“When people hear bush, they see gold,” Stephens told me thoughtfully as we navigated the river, “whitened” from “missiles” (river mining dredges). The rumbling murmur of the fifteen-HP speedboat gently propelled us forward. We were returning from Saturday market day in Bartica, where most of the community ventured to buy the meat, rice, and some vegetables for the week until the following week. Despite the village’s complaints about missiles in the waterway to the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs,<sup>27</sup> they remain a constant presence, altering the cartography of the river with huge mounds of sediment “beaches” formed as a result of the powerful suctioning force of gravel pumps, which vacuumed material from the riverbed in search of gold.<sup>28</sup> “I hear a man from Georgetown has a claim to this river,” he waved his arm in a sweeping gesture. As a riverine community, the village heavily relied on the river for subsistence fishing and farming and everyday activities like cooking, bathing, and washing clothes. During the unusually dry season, many had turned to the river for drinking water. However, the

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<sup>27</sup> Following the 2015 national elections, the ministry was renamed the Ministry of Indigenous Affairs.

<sup>28</sup> Mining regulations permit river dredging up to 20 meters on both riverbanks, with missile dredging being cited as a concern for the turbidity of rivers being mined and the potential for disfiguring channels of the river. See Thomas, Clive, *Too Big to Fail: A Scoping Study of the Small and Medium Scale Gold and Diamond Mining Industry in Guyana*, (unpublished paper, 2009), 22.

government continued to grant licensing ‘claims’ for dredging operations. These claims I later learned were designated sections of the river cordoned off by fluid boundaries rather than rigid land coordinates, making it difficult to decipher if missiles actually operate within bounds.

The village received its land title in 2015, he explained, immediately preceding the national elections in May. But despite having secured land title, the village has no decision-making input on the locations of river or land dredges, as water and subsurface minerals remain property of the State. [REDACTED] was undergoing the second phase of securing absolute collective title: demarcation of the land. Officials from Lands and Survey, along with select members of the community, had ventured inland on both sides of the river to cut boundary lines into the land, an endeavor that draws on the collective memory of village land use. At one of the village meetings, the village had settled on several older men in the village, the ones that had lived in the Cuyuni region before the community had expanded to its current size. When the council reconvened several weeks later, they were shocked to discover that nearly a third was left out of the land title. They had been advised to submit an application for an extension of lands they already occupied, and as Stephens explained to with a grimace, “There is no guarantee of its approval.”

During his time as former toshao, the village continued to face uncertainty even with village title<sup>29</sup>. We had arrived to his family’s landing, and sat on tree stumps in the shadows of the leaves from several overhanging coconut tree overlooking the river. He leaned over, swiftly drew several vertical lines in the sand to indicating the river and drew

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<sup>29</sup> *Toshao* refers to the democratically elected village leader of a titled Amerindian village.

a larger rectangular outline –the boundary of the village lands: “When I was village toshao, we talked about applying for title [the village], which some didn’t agree with, you know.” Many had viewed individual leasing as more ‘secure’ than title. Some had secured individual twenty-five year private leases prior to the village title and had been informed that those who had lease could keep it and after it lapsed they would become considered part of the village lands. “But people hold onto this ‘ting that they we can’t get a loan with village title.” I nodded my head and told him that other residents I had spoken with shared that perspective.

Stephens shook his head exasperated. “It’s just like you renting the land from the state, so there’s no guarantee, where[as] a title is you own land, ... but a *lease* is like you renting an apartment.” He paused, then explained that while titled villages exercised a certain level of control and self-governance, the discovery of subsurface mineral resources in the area, whether on land or water, made the village vulnerable to land annexation for the expansion of extractive industries, which could mean village relocation or remapping of its boundaries: “Some people look at it as we got we rights, yes, but when you get this reservation you still don’t get control because if they find a piece of gold here, people can come in and take back a piece of land on the reservation. Dis is we land, yeah. But...you got to try *dey* [there].” He then remarked incredulously that another village down the river had recently undergone land demarcation several years after receiving titled status. Similarly, their boundaries did not accurately reflect the provided description. Half of the village was left out of the demarcation process.

These accounts reflect colonial and post-1966 governments' policy of rescinding land titles when new diamond or gold shouts signaled the potential for mineral wealth, particularly in the Upper Mazaruni District (APA 1999; APA, Upper Mazaruni Amerindian District Council, and the Forest People's Programme 2000). Further, it underscores the contested and sometimes arbitrary nature of mapping. As a small-scale miner remarked: 'governing bodies such as the GGMC<sup>30</sup> and the Lands & Surveys Commission have poor communication [between government entities],'<sup>31</sup> exacerbating ongoing land conflicts not only between indigenous communities and miners but also *between* miners through overlapping boundaries and inaccurate demarcations. Underlining these mapping practices is a colonial cartography that frames indigenous land struggles as a problem to be managed.

Moreover, because much of the local economy was oriented toward the demands of miners traversing through the riverine community, from chicken farms to rum shops, mining dominated the local economy. Stephens explained that much of the jobs available to villagers revolved around the mining industry and, to a lesser extent, forestry, with the majority of medium and large-scale operations conducted by coastlanders or Brazilians with the capital to buy expensive equipment such as excavators. He described the backbreaking labor involved in working in the backdam over the years before becoming a boat captain. Gesturing in the some hundred feet in the distance from a large pear tree to our seated spot, he told me that he described how each man working in a labor line shoveling and hollowing out the earth. "Each man had to drag thirty bags of earth each

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<sup>30</sup> Guyana Geology and Mines Commission

<sup>31</sup> This originates from a personal conversation with a female miner residing in Georgetown.

day! If nah, you doan [don't] get pay!” His more recent experiences working “topside,”<sup>32</sup> had similar conditions. He squinted at me sideways, the deep lines he had earned from hours of squinting against the refracted light from the river as he carried miners topside. “The backdam is another world. It’s a world within a world.”

His statement reflected the imaginary of the hinterland as a ‘cowboy landscape’ of excess plagued by lawlessness, disorder, and violence, but also teeming with untapped wealth. These images underline much of the discourse surrounding the ‘bush,’ an imaginary of the interior that extends to the bodies occupying that space. As another villager recounted, perceptions of the bush shape how Amerindian people are treated: “when they see you from the interior, they try to take advantage because you come from ‘gold bush’ area. Some would make joke and say the bush must be burning” (upon seeing Amerindians in the coastal capital of Georgetown). This ‘bush’/hinterland and coastal imaginaries reflect a bifurcated landscape, in which Amerindians are portrayed as out of place.

In his analysis of the coastlander imaginary toward the hinterland, anthropologist Terrence Roopnaraine (2009) examines the experiences of porkknockers.<sup>33</sup> Through bodily experiential knowledge, a ‘physical hardening of the flesh’ and gradual acquisition of the knowledge required to labor and live in the hinterland, he argues that *being* in the

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<sup>32</sup> ‘Topside’ refers to a geographical area further up the Cuyuni River near the Venezuela-Guyana border, an interior area where mining, fuel shunting, and other activities like occur.

<sup>33</sup> T. Roopnaraine provides an excellent analysis of coastlander porkknockers’ sense-making of the ‘bush’ as reflecting a coastlander ontology; while Amerindians involvement in the mining sector often occurs in exploited positions, additional research on Amerindian perceptions of mining as a potential avenue for indigenous self-determination and development is necessary.

hinterland constitutes a hermeneutic ‘shaped by the collision of a coastlanders ontology with a world of radical difference, both physically and culturally’ (25). Through a process of self-transformation, coastlanders reconcile ‘a series of contradictions and negative polarities’ that underline their ambivalence toward the hinterland: ‘thus poverty becomes wealth, disorientation becomes familiarity, the wild becomes the dominated and constraint becomes freedom.’<sup>34</sup> This ambivalence toward the hinterland through the partial conferral of rights, also reveals the contested and fraught terrain where indigenous peoples reproduce, contest, and disrupt the imposition of neoliberal forms of recognition, in particular titling processes, that relegate indigenous lands and bodies to a space of corporeal-spatial precarity. This was readily apparent in the confrontation between the residents of a nearby Amerindian village and the state.

#### **“LIKE EVERYTHING GO BACK TO THE STATE”**

The black water creek ran along the side of the community, the main source of potable water for the village of ██████. The former village council member, JR was explaining to me that the creek’s naturally black waters, stemming from its flow through the surrounding forested swamps, usually resembled the color of black tea or coffee. Now, it had taken on a muddy brown color so light the water appeared “whitened.” The gold mining operation in the “backdam,” or the mining area further inland, neighbored the villages’ demarcated lands and the main sandy that began at the village’s riverfront

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid

traversed through the village into the mining operations. In fact, as the village owned the road, any miners with working the claims had to pay a percentage of their gold declarations to the village. Legally, the Mining Act stipulated that a buffer zone be erected between titled Amerindian land and granted mining concessions; however, the buffer zone had been all but illegally absorbed by the mining operations.

Even with the so-called “buffer,” the dredging operations which required the excavation of the land, in combination with the use of water pumps and mercury to separate gold from other minerals, had seeped into the soil, washing to the community’s creek, effectively contaminating the area where schoolchildren normally bathed before trudging off to school. The normal seasonal rains exacerbated the situation even more. The village council had complained numerous times, he told me as we continued walking through the village, waving at the curious faces that appeared around the front porch railing of a nearby house. The council had sent several letters to the then Ministry of Amerindian Affairs protesting the contamination of their water supply. In response, the ministry had ordered operations cease until the miners had properly put in place regulations to prevent future contamination of the water. Soon after the water began to “clear up,” through the recurring rains and the steady flow of the creek to the river at the community’s banks, the mining had resumed dredging, contaminating the water once again. It appeared to be an ongoing cycle.

I had met JR a few months earlier in September during the Amerindian Heritage Celebrations in the nearby village of [REDACTED], where he had served as a judge for the heritage pageant. The annual event heralded a time of nation-wide celebration of the

presence, perseverance, and preservation of Amerindian culture in Guyana. Various events were planned for the month long celebration under the theme “Preserving Our Customs and Traditions,” which took shape differently depending on regional differences and the distinctive cultures of the nine indigenous nations. Young Amerindian women and girls competed for the title of Ms. Amerindian Heritage in their respective villages, with finalists from each region competing in a national competition. The competition was fierce, with each competitor evaluated based on her knowledge and demonstration of cultural practices, dances, and poised responses to questions on topics that ranged from challenges affecting the Amerindian community to violence against women, mining, education, and development.

Encouraged by the village family I lived with, and my own desire to learn firsthand the numerous dances my grandmother often reminisced about and bemoaned their increasing disappearance, I had eagerly joined in the festivities. During the intermission of the pageant, partnered with the only other black-Amerindian male dancer in the village, I had danced on a stage hastily constructed from bamboo and plywood and decorated for that year’s theme. Shane laughed as he recalled his surprise when he saw that a “dougla,” or mixed girl had known the traditional dances. “You even made your own traditional wear!” I had come to visit ██████ at the behest of the toshao of ██████, who made it clear that the village was undergoing significant challenges over competing claims to the land and was struggling with how to negotiate its peripheral involvement in mining, its desires for development, and the social and environmental impacts the mining operations were having on the community.



The village dates back to the 1950s he told me, "At least from what I can trace back to my grandparents." He held his hands out as if to say don't quote me. I asked him where the villagers had originated from before then. "Wakapoa. We're mainly Arawak and Carib, with a few tribes from the Rupununi." He said. "So they migrated to the area?" I asked.

He looked at me quizzically and laughed. "You know how Amerindians does migrate and move, we don't stay in one place." I nodded, as this was a similar pattern for many of the surrounding villages of the lower Cuyuni-Mazaruni region. "So most of the village is from Region 2?" I asked. We had wandered back to a nearby shop, several men wrestling with machinery as a tractor approached the group. I watched with thinly veiled interest. "Yea, from Pomeroun side," he said.

Situated between the Orinoco and Essequibo rivers, the Pomeroun River cuts across the Northwest District in a westerly direction, discharging its waters into the Atlantic. The archaeological record located in Upper Pomeroun in Siriki sited the original Dutch plantation, now known as Charity, as the main transit point for the North West District. Much like the Cuyuni region, where the village of [REDACTED] sat nestled at the beginning of its lower region, the primary means of transportation was by boat. Similarly, [REDACTED] had a significant number of descendants of Arawak's that had settled in the region, reflecting historical patterns of migration and movement.

Unlike other riverine communities, [REDACTED] had a road that traversed through the community, which miners and loggers used to access the back dam. Because the road belonged within the village's boundaries, the miners needed to pay a fee to the village council.

He recounted the conflict that exploded between villagers and the Ministry of Mining when a team of people had come to the village with mining equipment. In 2014, the entire village had been divided into mining blocks, despite being granted village title in 2006. The community refused to contact the press, deciding to deal with the conflict directly with the respective ministries. When the miners, along with officials from the Ministry returned, the community barred them from entering the community, blocking the road with an erected gate and refused to allow them entrance. They could legally do so as the road was included in their title. Ultimately, the ministry sided with the miners and determined that the community did not in fact have a claim to the land and would need to be relocated.

“The Ministry of Amerindian Affairs is like its own thing, independent from GGMC (the Ministry of Mining) and Lands & Surveys are one side” (they all function differently), he told me, his arms gesturing as if to indicate two opposing forces. Lands and Surveys was the only government body that had the exact location and demarcation of the titled village. “GGMC had [REDACTED] in an entirely different location up the river, and the area we live in as 'empty,'” he exclaimed incredulously.

The fact of the matter is that the government appears to be functioning with completely different mappings of the land—one for indigenous communities pending title and demarcation, and those that had already received their titled boundaries, and another for land concessions, or “blocks” for mining and logging. Another nearby community had been divided in half—half of the community recognized as communal collective title, and the other seen as individual land leases or left out entirely. Other communities had

overlapping boundaries with other mining concessions or surrounding villages. “The current deputy toshao claims he has Amerindian heritage and has given out mining claims to members of his family who are all East Indian.” He said.

I interjected, unclear about the correlation he seemed to be making between the ethnic/racial identity of the deputy toshao, who under the guidelines of the village council had authority under the toshao. He explained that the deputy toshao had claims to be indigenous, but much of his family that he claims to be from the Pomeroun side was of East Indian heritage. He stated that the village council had not readily pursued this or contested his claims, because it would be very difficult to do so considering that the Act outlines anyone with Amerindian descent as being “Amerindian.” Underlining his explanation was the idea that denying this deputy toshaos claim might paradoxically instigate charges of inauthenticity and the instigation of a rubric against which other residents would be determined to be not truly Amerindian. Another community located closer to the coast had come under attacks as not being a legitimate Amerindian village due to its mixed-race composition. Indigenous NGOs had staunchly opposed the attacks, paradoxically citing the definition for an Amerindian outlined in the contested 2006 Amerindian Act, which considered an Amerindian to be any person that is a “citizen of Guyana who—(a) belongs to any of the native or aboriginal peoples of Guyana; or is a descendant of any person mentioned in paragraph (a). Despite this seemingly expansive definition of Amerindian belonging, ascription of Amerindian identity continued to revolve around phenotypical categorizations. In fact, it had not been long ago that the previous Act

had required Amerindians to be counted on a registry conducted by an official that identified whether or not a person actually belonged on the list.

As we strolled back to the shop, I asked how the community “pushed back” against what's happening to and within their communities. He paused thoughtfully. “That is a hard thing because its like everything goes back to...the state.” He explained that of course the community continues to issue complaints to the respective legal bodies, and he himself had been using Facebook and other social media as a platform for making the issues of ██████ known to the public, “So that peoples can know what is going on in the interior, in the bush.”

The experiences of these communities demonstrate the vulnerabilities of indigenous lands and livelihoods. It points to the unevenness of development that advances a neoliberal project that delegates limited territorial control even as it relegates ultimate responsibility and accountability to indigenous communities themselves. Yet, within these constrained spaces of indigenous self-determination circumscribed by developmental models and legalities that advance national interests, it also reveals the space where indigenous peoples attempt to carve out their own epistemological and embodied subjectivities that do not rely on the proscribed national imaginaries of politics e.g. the political party. As Stephens’ cartographic etchings in the sand and Yvette’s adamant refusal to delimit the opportunities afforded to youth (in particular women in the community) signaled, the Amerindian subject is not confined to the temporal and spatial boundaries ascribed to indigenous being and belonging in Guyana. Further, it reveals the structural forces shaping indigenous struggles to maintain, retain, and exercise governing control over their respective lands. Through

spatial-temporal mechanisms and processes the state diminishes indigenous controls over their respective lands, even as it seeks to integrate them through neoliberal logics and development, demonstrating the politics of mapping as an exercise of power that frame indigenous lands as a problem to be managed. In the following chapter, I will examine the connections between the precarity of indigenous lands and its connection to the body, in particular the indigenous female body. Within this chapter, I will also examine the incommensurable, yet related relationship between the violence indigenous women experience with respects to the pervasive heteropatriarchal violence enacted on the bodies of Creole women.

*Must We Be Shame*

Something stirred from  
Buck beads

Black and Red, these buck beads

Small, these buck beads  
And we get dressed  
And we dance ourselves

In/to

In/to being

She dances herself into being  
She dresses herself into being

Buck girl, don't be shamed  
Buck girl, with your tibusiri  
Skirt

Twirl, let us twirl  
Buck girl

Cassava dance  
Let we wash the cassava,  
Girl  
Let we wrestle the matapee  
Drain the cassava  
Buck girl

Let it drain into the floor,  
Roll off the stage  
Let them see you sweat, for you dance  
On plywood, on soil

Let it drip  
Let the poison drip  
Let the poison

Drip

Come back in step  
Head titled back  
Smile, like you mean it

Dance buck girl

In/to being

## **Chapter Four: (Dis)remembering the Dead: “Buck” and “Black”**

### **Women and Gendered Colonial Violence**

This chapter will examine how representations of gender and sexual violence register within the Guyanese social imaginary as an additive violence, rather than integral to and a manifestation of racial/ethnic hierarchies that differentially affect Guyanese women. In particular, this chapter traces how representations of the Amerindian “buck woman,” as a naturalized extension of the “bush” or hinterland, enables heteropatriarchal violence. Conceptualized as disparate experiences, I trace how violence against indigenous women is connected, indeed relationally constructed against Creole Guyanese women. This chapter problematizes the analytical tendency to analysis the experiences of indigenous and Creole women as separate spaces—respectively situated within the space of the “bush” hinterland and the coastland. Rather, I contend that a relational analysis, one that considers the (hyper)visibility of the indigenous woman and the (in)visibility of the Afro-Guyanese woman, reveals the mutually constitutive way in which colonial gendered notions of the indigenous and black female body is constructed. This hypervisibility/invisibility reflects how indigeneity and blackness occupy distinct positions in relation to the state and configuration of territorial power. I examine how the violence enacted against Indo-Guyanese women remains largely invisible through her representation as the figure deemed appropriate for reproducing the Guyanese nation.

I will begin with an exploration of the highly sensationalized case of the killing of an Afro-Guyanese woman that reveals national commonsensibilities and state complicity



in the pervasiveness of gender violence in the Guyanese context and how her murder became taken up as emblematic of collective social dismemberment. My work builds on scholarship that has examined the state complicity in gender and sexual violence, in particular how institutional discourses of rights actually enable and sustain violence against women (e.g. Speed 2016<sup>35</sup>; Thobani 2015). I bring the context of Guyana to bear on this scholarship, in order to demonstrate its inattention to the interconnectedness of black and indigenous subjugation and terror, as an enduring legacy of colonial regimes. As Caribbean feminist scholar Alissa Trotz (2004) argues in her analysis of the gendered political violence that emerged following the contested electoral claims of fraudulent practices in the 1997 and 2001 national elections, the racialized gender female body occupies a place within the Guyanese national imaginary as a site of reproducing essentializing difference and racialized boundaries. Although her analysis focuses on the violence primarily experienced by Afro and Indo-Guyanese women, I extend her analysis to consider what is at stake in the reproduction of the image of the Amerindian “buck woman” in the social imaginary.

Following Trotz, I examine how racialized gendered female bodies “emerge as central in the creation of racialized Guyanese identities, such that assaulting particular constituencies of women can be seen as an attack on the viability of the community with which they are identified” and racial division map onto “women’s bodies[,] becoming the site on which group loyalties are inscribed and enacted” (2004: 8). I bring her work, and

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<sup>35</sup> Shannon Speed, “Postscript to [Dangerous Discourses: Human Rights and Neoliberal Multiculturalism in Mexico](#)” *PoLar* 2016.

the work of other Caribbean feminist scholars (Puri 1997, Morgan 2004; Beckles 2003) that have long argued about the interconnections between race, gender, and the body to examine how these particular forms of racialized sexual violence inscribe representations onto the bodies of Creole and Amerindian women as a continuum of violence. Rather than an additive approach, I argue that the violence enacted against Amerindian women, and her circulating representation as “buck woman,” is integral to the representation of the “bush” as a redemptive space for the maturation of the nation-state. In particular, this chapter connects the bodily violence indigenous women experience to the regimes of legality and recognition that dispossess indigenous lands and circumscribe indigenous sovereignty. In tandem with the subjugation of the land through ongoing colonial relations between the state and indigenous peoples, the racial-sexual representations of indigenous bodies, in particular Amerindian women, relegate indigenous communities to what I have called a space of *corporeal-spatial precarity*.

#### **(DIS)REMEMBERING THE DEAD, DISMEMBERING THE COLLECTIVE BODY**

In March 2015, several months into my fieldwork, the dismembered body of a woman was found on the 240-mile stretch of cement and rocks, the seawall that runs nearly the entire length of the coastline, built primarily through enslaved Africans under Dutch colonial rule. Contrasting sharply with the overcast sky and scattered gray boulders, the media circulated an image of a zoomed in frame of red and blue pixelated shapes against darker flesh; discovered in a blue brassiere and red skirt rolled up around her midsection, investigators suspected sexual assault. Of African ancestry, the woman’s

body was discovered near the seawall of historical African villages of Buxton and Annandale located along the eastern coastal stretch of land where the majority of Guyanese Creole “coastlanders” –descendants of enslaved Africans and indentured East Indians, live.

The news graced the cover of nearly every local newspaper. One banal heading read: “Another corpse discovered on seawall...Woman’s headless, limbless body on foreshore” (Kaieteur News). Repeatedly, the press referred to her partially nude body and the possibility of sexual assault, discussing in gruesome detail her corpse and the crowds of villagers from Annandale and Buxton that had ventured out to the seawall to witness police work at the scene—the painstaking search for the remnants of her body and the eventual removal of her body. Referred to as the “Buxton Butcher,” her assailants, a laborer living in the same flat as her, and two other accomplices confessed their involvement in a robbery gone awry. Allegedly, when his two accomplices had dealt the woman a death blow to the head with a piece of wood and had begun to dismember her limbs in the house, he assisted them in placing her body into a plastic barrel, fetching it in a wheelbarrow to the foreshores. There, at the seawall, under the cover of darkness, they removed her head to delay her identification, tossing her into the sea where they hoped the high tide would wash her away. Yet, her body remained trapped within the boulders. The very sea they believed would conceal her death refused to accept her. At midday, the receding tide revealed to us her dismembered entirety –her missing head, and hands and feet severed from below the elbows and knees. I foreground this act of spectacular violence to trace the way gender/sexual violence are constitutive sites of colonial power and relations in post

independence Guyana. Relatedly, the discourses surrounding her murder became mobilized as a metaphor for the colonial violences, as forces of division, as a dismembering power that functions over and on the landscape and its engendered racial and classed enclaves within, a coalescing of embedded logics regarding those deemed less than human by colonial regimes of power.

Further, the murder of this woman highlights several things about how the violence women in Guyana is portrayed, how their circulation creates an understanding of normative violence, even in instances of “unimaginable” and “shocking” violence. First, much of the discourse surrounding her murder immediately became imbricated within overlapping political and racial/ethnic tensions and stereotypes, as evidence of Guyana’s “moral decay” under the social and political corruption of the government economic policies and practices. Second, individualistic at the level of reasoning, or as an spectacular instance of violence that could be addressed through individualistic self-regulation i.e. measures that women could do to take responsibility for their own safety and/or addressed through economic means of empowerment; Third, the public response, specifically from nearby African villages, bespoke a sense of rural abandonment in poor, primarily African villages. That Georgetown is imagined as the center of Guyana, which is reflected materially in the concentration of resources in the capital “city,” complicate notions of a homogenous “coastlander” identity. As such, this chapter problematizes the tendency to conceptualize the violence experienced by Creole “coastlander” women and “hinterland” Amerindian women as occupying separate spheres. The second thread traces how gender and sexual violence, though portrayed and articulated in normalizing ways, is often framed *as an*

*additive violence*, rather than integral to other forms of violence, imbricated along the line of race, class, sexuality, and gender.

Beyond the shock widely expressed in Guyana over the brutal murder of this “visiting” Guyanese woman, it was simultaneously said alongside the phrase, “dis is Guyana,”; an expression I often heard in private interactions with close relations, but also reiterated in public discourse or various workshops I attended, such as civil society meetings on racial discrimination, creating sustainable development opportunities, and accountability within politics, among others. I soon realized this expression revealed not only the intense exasperation, frustration, and/or apathy by those that uttered it, but also pointed to their awareness of larger structural problems that constrained what many believed possible for addressing interlocking inequities in Guyanese society. In this instance, I argue that it revealed the pervasive and structuring and violent force of heteropatriarchy, in particular violence against women, which had become taken as constituting Guyanese society.

In one of the numerous pictures that circulated through print and social media, a woman stands on the seawall next to a police officer, pointing in the distance out of frame. Below, the caption fills in the unknown frame of reference for the reader, that she is explaining to the officer that a nearby object found on the scene is used “by a certain religion,” insinuating that the gruesome “chopping” of the woman’s body might be part of a “sacrificial” ceremony. Police confirmed they were investigating this as a possible scenario, and markings on the seawall provided further evidence that at least part of the dismembering had occurred on the seawall. Another blurred images reveals the overcast

skies, and scattered boulders, the camera zoomed into to capture one particular boulder, red and green pixelated colors dots conjuring the detailed description of the blue brassiere and a red skirt she was discovered in. Underpinning the language around the speculation that it might be a sacrificial dismemberment to appease a deity were thinly veiled racialized assumptions of “pagan” practitioners of non-Christian faith.

Within the span of 12 days, two other bodies were discovered on the seawall; a young 14-year old girl found among the boulders that form part of the sea defense near the University of Guyana’s access road and soon after, nearby, the battered body of 29-year old man on the rocky seaside of the seawall in the Georgetown area of Kitty. A 240-mile stretch of cement and rocks, the seawall runs nearly the entire length of the coastline, and all of the coastline in the capital city of Guyana, that was built primarily through enslaved Africans under Dutch colonial rule. Every Sunday people of all ages and backgrounds venture to the seawall—children squeal as they flip on trampolines, the smells of barbecued chicken and popcorn mingle with waves crashing on the rocks. The shadowed silhouettes of lovers, joggers, and meandering children spot the sea wall prominently outlined against the pink and red sunsets. At night, the energy changes and becomes more of a scene for adults and teenagers, when big stereos appear and the music overrides the rhythms of the water. This is the place that became a sanctuary away from the jarring sounds of the city. It was here that I could surrender and release my analytic mind.

After news of the gruesome murder spread like wildfire, my family insisted I travel only during particular times of the day. This was difficult to accommodate considering the workshops or interviews I conducted in the afternoons might run several hours. With the

early sunrise at 5am and its prompt departure around 6pm, a fixed window of time placed methodological restrictions on when I could meet with potential interlocutors. The air itself felt tense, people were on edge after the recent spate of murders. Though I took heed, and tried my best to return home before that time, where the presumed availability of the sun's light would provide some protection against the lurking darkness. Compounded by the fact that I was a young female, whose research fundamentally demanded interaction with strangers or whom I only knew through contacts I had made with members of the indigenous grassroots organization with whom I was collaborating or the suggestions of residents of the village. To assuage the lingering fears of my family, I made every attempt to strike a middle-ground by only conducting interviews in public spaces, such as coffee shops or parks with frequent visitors while I lived on the coast. This feeling of constrained movement through the city is not a singular experience, and forms part of a larger structure in which spatial movement, for women in particular, is a constant preoccupation. I realized that I could not completely distance myself from the reality that my own black flesh could be disposed of, left on the seawall for a passersby to discover or to be captured in a photograph for public speculation and debate about my death. As researcher and ethnographer, I could establish a tenuous distance in the pages of my fieldnotes and an analytical gaze, yet I knew that I too moved within this space of racialized precarity.

Within the past several years, dozens of bodies (women and men) have been discovered on the seawall, washed ashore or entrapped within the boulders and rocks of the coast. It is not uncommon to see images of the dead disseminated through various media e.g. newspapers and photos posted to websites, and become captured as evidence of the

lawlessness of Guyanese society, often juxtaposed to nostalgic remembering of the colonial government, specifically British governance. I often heard people remark that while colonialism had been profoundly exploitative, the current conditions of “brutality” and “cowboy” forms of governance that had become rampant in Guyanese society signaled devolution from the structure of order that had been created under colonialism. This order was reflected in the ingenuity of British landscaping of the city and the customs that had maintained respectable decorum and common decency. These nostalgic comments often struck me as odd considering the architectural landscape, its monuments and street names, bore the history of the legacies of colonialism and the struggles of enslaved Africans and indentured Indians to secure a place of freedom and liberation outside of this imposed ‘order.’

Soon, images of the woman’s body began to appear on social media sites, like Facebook. When one of my cousins tried to show me the pictures that had appeared on her Facebook feed, I refused to look. Disgusted, I vehemently denounced the pictures as an incredible disrespect to the woman’s life, which had become reduced to a spectacle of terror and violence. She nodded at my impassioned diatribe but did not respond. Several days after the discovery of her body, I watched the evening news with my family. My uncle, seated in the couch adjacent to me, shared the news he had learned from local people in the community. As a minibus driver working the “main road” that traversed along and through the coastal villages, he would have heard passengers “gaffing” and speculating about possible motives. One such story he overheard is that over the loud music blaring from the woman’s house the neighbors heard screaming and shouting, but they think it was “jus’



people rowing,” and put it from their minds. Incredulous, I asked him why they didn’t call the police or at least see if everything was OK with their neighbor if they heard screaming loud enough to pierce the music. His eyes narrowed in thought, he told me it may be because they were scared to intervene or they think “is nah we business.”

I was struck not only by the spectacular cadence of the language peoples used to describe her death, but also the speculations that arose from such violence. It felt like a sense of betrayal to her life, which had been reduced to the moment her life was extinguished. When the police were able to identify her—a US based Guyanese “Buxton trader”— the representation of her became mobilized as emblematic of violence against women in Guyana and sparked a number of public discussions about violence against women, much of which centered around reflecting on its cause(s) and potential avenues for educating men and women on how to deal with conflict in ways that mitigated violence. Yet, much of the discussion devolved into an explication of the political climate, increasingly contentious in the wake of the upcoming national elections.

The next day on my usual mini-bus ride to town, I tuned into one of the local radio stations. I sat teetering on the edge of the seat near the window, with three other passengers squeezed into the same row. A cool breeze blessed my face through the cracked window, the conductor in front of me peered out the window, searching for more passengers, After the cycle of songs ended, the radio host began talking about the women’s death, in particular how images of her could be found on social media sites like Facebook. "What if you see image of nude, naked exposed woman?" Another commentator interjected,"--and if it's your relative, your daughter exposed in such a way, whether deceased or not..."

The first broadcaster rambled on, and then grew silent to allow a caller to weigh in on the conversation.

"Overseas, you know, respect and privacy is protected," The female caller remarked on the 'normalcy' of violent images that often graced the front pages of prominent newspapers.

The radio host responds, "We adopt laws from our colonial rulers, [but] the people 'dem moved away from these laws."

"Guyana part of the weakest conglomeration of countries (CARICOM). We don't have the willpower or resources."

"—No, we have the resources, just a set of big people that don't want to move!" Another caller weighed in vehemently.

"Conductor, corner coming," I shouted over the music, despite sitting a mere foot behind him. He knocked hard on the metal roof above the window, and immediately the driver careened to a stop at the corner. Squeezing from the space between the door and three other sweaty bodies packed together tightly in the same row, I handed my fare to the driver. "Thanks, " though I was anything but. I quickly crossed the street, St. George's Cathedral looming above me. In the center of a rotunda street, it was one of many Anglican churches in Georgetown, with the distinction of being one of the tallest wooden churches in the world, its Gothic arches recalling colonial architectural engineering, a visual dissonance from its surrounding cement buildings.

Another caller phoned in, quickly introduced herself and her village and told the radio host, "My niece would like to say something (shuffling) —come quick!" When the girl

reached the phone, she tentatively greeted the broadcaster. After a pause, the broadcaster prompts her, "How did you feel when you saw the image?"

(Long pause)... "I don't...I don't really know."

"Were you sad?—He prompts.

"Yes, it made me sad and for young girls to...take note for girls to be a leader, not a follower." She elaborated that girls should be careful who they were around. I stop in mid-stride, slightly taken aback that this brutal killing had become recast as a moral cautionary tale. It rendered the murder of the woman as an example of lapsed prudence. The male radio host hummed in approval, and reiterated that young women should indeed be careful about where and with whom they traveled with, and that dressing in particular ways could draw unnecessary attention. After thanking the caller, his voice trailed off as he signaled the next wave of songs.

For several weeks, the woman's murder was discussed before disappearing into the national memory of countless other murders against women in Guyana, of other women that have encountered violence at the hands of partners, lovers, family members, neighbors, and strangers. In the comments section of the online local newspapers, *Stabroek News* (March 2015), readers weighed in on her death:

“WHAT EVIL THING THIS WOMAN HAD DONE TO MAKE A HUMAN BEING DID THIS TO HER. IT'S AN EVERY DAY TUNE TO SAY "REST IN PEACE"

“Our [sic] women folk are under siege in this country. who is protecting them? when or what does it take for the authorizes to start looking at this as a serious crisis in society? can someone tell me where I can find all the outraged groups, concerned

citizens, SASOD, picketers, gaw1, bloggers, GHRA, CAR, GVAR, letter writers and the other staunch women's rights advocates? or Annandale don't qualify for public outrage and a selfie tee-shirt parade?

who ever you are RIP Sister.”

“If you should hear the discourse in today's Guyana concerning relationship matters regarding men and women, you would be amazed. It seem our men folk think its their god given right to have control over their women folk, the women themselves allow this behavior due to the fact many of them are economically dependent on their male partners, also there is still a lingering tradition of a woman's place, even highly educated working women in our society hold to a stance of behaving themselves for the men, if not they would be reprimanded and outcast as "she like to play man" as if to say women are not entitled to be an equal in a relationship. Fidelity is written off as a man's thing, should a women engage in the behavior in Guyana? ohhh its all the religious laws throw at her and she should subject herself to abuse of all kinds regardless of the under-pinning problems.

I've heard radio personalities engage in low levels of discourse to denigrate women for simple interpersonal relationships dynamics. And what is it, is this girls and boys are still to this day in Guyana are socialized in stark contrast in gender base values, not often enough the lines are blurred, so that the boy child can learn how to cultivate empathy and compassion for the female kind or be a co-nurturer. A girl child on the other hand are not taught at an early age to know her self-worth, so as much as women folks educate themselves in Guyana there is this the cultural mindset of a woman's place. Meanwhile boy child is socialized to be the breadwinner, the leader and is encourage to be selfish, forceful and a self of entitlement, the behaviors is even perpetrated against those they care about and its acceptable. I hear tons of stories every day of maltreatment of our females, young and old and they seem to settle down by simply conceding [sic] "its how life is". So we have to educate both the boy child and girl child at an early age of how behave and how to harness good interpersonal skills which can result in less aggression and more understanding from the males and more assertiveness and self value from females.”

Other commenters explicitly linked the case to the conditions of violence under the then presiding People's Progressive Party (PPP) government and its inability to stem the violence, naming the beheading murder of well-known businessman Mohamed Farouk Kalamadeen in 2008, and the execution style murder of well-known activist Courtney

Crum-Ewing in early 2015. As commentators suggested, the violence had extended over and to the bodies of women. Others urged for government intervention to what they saw as an increasing “siege on women” and in particular a critique of the invisibility of national outrage against violence against Afro-Guyanese women which became couched in political terms; this elision seemingly demonstrated the marginalization of Afro-Guyanese under a predominantly Indian-led PPP government, and signaled the need for a new government in power. The impending national elections, in which the newly formed ANU-AFC “multiracial” coalition party was seen as heralding in an almost messianic era of social and political renewal, unity, and progress. For others, her death invoked memories of violence seen as eerily similar in her dismemberment on the shore, when the bodies of limbless and headless children began appearing on the shore in the 70s. Readers explicitly linked this to the political violence that was occurring during that time.

### **ON THE PARADOX OF GENDER VIOLENCE**

What does it mean that the extent of the discourse surrounding her murder revolved around one of a normalized violence, such that even the violent dismembering of a woman’s flesh is understood as being within the purview of naturalized violence? Even as I write this ethnographic description, not only of the visual and discursive parameters of her death, I have ruminated over what it means to mobilize her image, symbolically and metaphorically, to demonstrate how *femicide*, does not register within the national discourse on violence against women? The dialogue surrounding violence against women,

described through the words of being “chopped,” “bored,”<sup>36</sup> “choked” and “dismembered,” have created a discursive field where these forms of violence become paradoxically hypervisible and invisible, silenced and constrained so that the everyday lives and experiences of women, their complex lives and the conditions under which violence against women structures a field of normalcy, are not able to enter the discussion. I focus on the dismembered black flesh of this woman to inquire about the ways in which the kinds of violence that are enacted against women in Guyanese society, not only is imbricated through gender oppression but also through a racialized lens. While women across every strata of Guyanese society experiences subjection and heteropatriarchal violence, in what ways have our eagerness to displace questions of race, place, and space, undermined our ability to attend to the *specificity* of women’s suffering along axis of race and class.

The hypervisibility of spectacular violence against women, and the attendant consumption and circulation of that violence within the social body illuminate not only the normalization of how power is performed over the bodies and lives of Guyanese women, but how it has particular manifestations for Black, Indian, and Indigenous women, which can be related back to the presiding question/problem of land and territory. Through the assembling of territory, through racial and gendered inscriptions, the colonial power structure is reproduced, through constitutive forms of gendered and sexualized violence. As feminist sociologist and activist Sunera Thobani argues, colonial relations are predicated on gendered violence and are sustained through liberal citizenship (2015).

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<sup>36</sup> To stab with a sharp object

Analyzing the incommensurable, yet triangulated relationship between “indigenous,” “immigrant,” and “white” women in the Canadian settler context, she demonstrates how the “raciality” of these groups is produced in the field of gendered violence and is foundational to the Canadian state, nation, and identity formation (2015: 3). Further, rather than transcending violence through citizenship and the institution of rights, she argues that it actually “facilitates the asymmetrical distribution of violence that sustains racially violated subject on gendered grounds within settler colonialism<sup>37</sup>.” While Thobani refers to a white settler-colonial state, her argument is generative for thinking through the way “black,” “Amerindian,” and “coolie” women are situated within a racial social formation and how the violence enacted upon their bodies are made (il)legible to the state. I bring these incommensurable, yet related violences together to reveal the libidinal economy of slavery and indigenous dispossession that structure contemporary violences to which they are subjected, even as they paradoxically rendered hypervisible and invisible.

Further, how might we read this field of gender and sexualized violence through dismemberment, as literal and metaphoric expression of the colonial relationship undergirding the legacies of Guyanese society—the ongoing constitutive force of histories of colonialism and its manifestations in the current neoliberal exploitative relationships to neocolonial forces e.g. China, United States, and the constraining forces of NGO and international monetary funds that constrain decolonial forms of governance, here articulated differently from notions of anti-colonialism? The dismemberment of the

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

individual body, in the metaphorical and literal sense, here the dismemberment of the black female body, cannot be extricated from the ongoing dismemberment of the collective social body and body politic. The thread of colonization preceding the declarative moment of independence continues to inform the categories that ascribe particular value through Eurocentric lens, despite being seen as an emancipatory anti-colonial struggle, independence signaled another phase of (neo)colonial relationships. Unearthing what the body politic is predicated upon, and how these categories instituted hierarchical notions of citizenship and territorialized ethnic imaginaries, allows for an analysis that does not reproduce binary distinctions of ‘here’ and ‘there,’ of ‘town’ and “bush,” which I argue must constitute part of the discussion on gender and sexual violence. In effect, these spatial divisions uphold the colonial narratives that reproduced this difference, as a mechanism of power and subjection that can be traced to the plantation system that indelibly marked the landscape through enslaved Africans, and later, Indian indentured laborers brought to Guyana to maintain British demands for sugar in the colonies and the metropole. That is, in contradistinction to the larger public discourses that engage the “problem” of sexual violence, exploitation, and subjection of women as one of economic inequality or “responsibilization” (Jeffries 2013) a conflict rather than a structural antagonism framing that can be redressed through neoliberal reforms, the dismemberment and killings of women in Guyana are reflective of the integral nature of violence against women to the maintenance of the inherited colonial relations. And also—forms of gratuitous violence visited on the body escape language; or rather attempts to represent such violence



In her collection of poems, *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks*, acclaimed poet NourbeSe Philip (1989) explores the relationship between language and power, and the “colonial residue” that haunts postcolonial struggles (Rajeev 2006, 33). Her words highlights the relationship between gender and the “physicality of words”<sup>38</sup> articulating the (im)possibility of representing spectacular instances of violence. Philip writes and in so doing demonstrates how “parsing—the exercise of dismembering language into fragmentary cells that forget to re-member.” At the bottom of the page, centered, which the reader can mistake for a footnote:

raped—regular, active, used transitively    the again and again    against  
women    participated into the passive voice as in, ‘to get raped’;    past  
present    future—tense(d) against the singular or plural number of the  
unnamed subject, man

Her words remind of us how language, evocative and emotive, in its attempt to imbue and portray forms of gratuitous violence visited on the body, paradoxically escapes it. In other words, the libidinal forms of violence exceed textual and discursive representation. Further, it illustrates the ways in which language and discourse, in this case the use of tenses and passive voice, exert control in how violence against women is imagined, as naturalized and inevitable. In relation to this instance of gender violence, the spectacle and spectacular violence enacted against her body, the question of language and power and how she is (re)presented in death (and life) are questions that I have grappled is how to relay these

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

sorts of violence without reenacting that violence over the black, brown, and indigenous body.

Black feminist scholar Saidiya Hartman's consideration of this question, in *Venus in Two Acts*, provides a way to think through the issue of representation, particularly as it relates to violence against the black female body. Hartman begins with a provocation: How does one begin to tell the stories of the slave, and what would these stories speak to? And for whom do they speak? Would it merely extend the violence of already violated, commodified bodies? The methodological confines of the archive, of the constricting authority of the "parameters of history" (2008: 9), and the "incommensurability between the experience of the slave" and the narrative form with its segmented notions of beginning, middle, and end, are the conditions of possibility for imagining a new mode of writing and envisioning a free state. Writing for Hartman is delimited within and against the silence and ubiquitous fictions of the archive. Paradoxically, even as there are complete absences of the slave, there is an excessive presence of "the libidinal investment in violence...the traffic between fact, fantasy, desire and violence" (2008: 5). This demands, "imagin[ing] what might have happened or might have been said or might have been done" to expose the uncertainties, contestations, and disjunctions involved in constructions of history, narrative, and event. In effect, critical fabulation aims to reveal the histories and experiences that have been "situated between two zones of death—social and corporeal death," that which has been tethered to the present conjuncture in which black life resides—an on-going condition of social death and "state of emergency" (2008:13). Lingering in the (im)possibility of rendering the experiences of the slave, in fact, allows Hartman to unveil

the continuities of the incomplete project of freedom in the present. In a similar vein, I wish to situate the normalization of violence enacted against women, in this particular case, the African woman as part and parcel to the libidinal economies that undergird the gendered categories of Guyanese womanhood and how this renders particular groups increasingly vulnerable to bodily forms of violence.

While I draw attention to the language of bodies, in order to bring to the foreground the hypervisible/invisible violence enacted against Creole and indigenous women, mobilizing the analytic of the body as a means to disrupt these narratives also runs the risk of reproducing that very violence it seeks to problematize by reducing the loss of life and lives to the corporeality of the body, to confining her again to her fleshiness, and thus, reinscribing the colonial gaze that wrought this violence upon her through the colonial imaginaries that travel on the body. Herein lies the fundamental tension: of rendering the experiences of Creole and indigenous women as constitutive of the colonial and (neocolonial) order, which render invisible these processes through an ideology of naturalized and normalized violence, yet not reproducing that same imaginary through my ethnographic representations.

The literature on femicide provides a means to analyze the sexual and gendered relations of power at play within the Guyanese context, in particular the proliferation and increasing visibilization of state recognition of the problem of gender violence. I argue that while the concept of femicide (distinct from femicide) emerges from the particularity of the Mexican historical and political context, in particular the mass killings of women takings place in Ciudad Juarez since 1993, I deploy the term here to point to the complicity

of the state, not merely individual perpetrators, in the continuum of violence to which indigenous and Creole women are subjected in their everyday lives. Both terms, femicide and feminicide, has steadily increased throughout Latin America and the Caribbean in the past decade. Originating from the work of U.S.-based criminologists Jill Radford and Diana Russell, femicide, defined as the misogynist killing of women on the basis of their gender as women, was first deployed in the Latin American context in 2004 by Marcela Lagarde to describe the unsolved mass killings of women in Ciudad Juarez. Lagarde's translation into Spanish, feminicidio, circulated throughout feminist activist circles to raise political consciousness of the mass killings. Soon, the discourse of femicide spread to other countries in the region. Despite its appearance in Mexico and Central American countries like El Salvador, Guatemala, and Costa Rica, femicide does not appear in the laws of the Caribbean countries, but rather the majority of the murders of women are prosecuted as aggravated homicide.

As it relates to violence against women, Guyana is a signatory to the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence against Women, known as the Convention of Belém do Pará, and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Violence Against Women (CEDAW). The Inter-American Convention asserts violence and abuse against women constitutes a violation of fundamental human rights and the freedom to those rights. Seven human rights treaties, including the Convention of Belem do Para and CEDAW, are directly incorporated into Guyana's Constitution through Article 154A. Despite two key pieces of legislation that aim to address violence against women in Guyana--the Domestic Violence Act 1996 and the

Sexual Offences Act 2010, and its consideration as very progressive laws due in part to its gender neutrality and recognition of homophobia as an impediment to service provisions for marginalized sexual and gender groups in Guyana, implementation and enforcement prevent the full force of these laws from being enacted. This is particularly crucial for queer and other non-gender conforming persons in Guyana, as currently these policies conflict with existing laws that continue to criminalize same-sex relations or non-conforming gender expression in public spaces, such as "cross-dressing." To date, there are no laws that specifically prohibit or protect LBT women from discrimination, abuse and targeted violence.<sup>39</sup> The Society Against Sexual Orientation Discrimination (SASOD) and the Guyana Equity Forum (GEF) have developed a discrimination reporting system to document incidents of discrimination and violence and to address the severe lack of statistical data available about violence affecting LBT women in Guyana.

The Guatemalan context, a country that has seen pervasive violence against women, with over 5,000 killings of women since 2003, has been designated as the highest number of any country in the region (GHRC 2010)<sup>40</sup>, becoming visible as being the most dangerous place for women in Latin America (Suarez & Jordon 2007). The work of scholar-activist Victoria Sanford (2008) deploys the concept of *feminicide* in place of femicide to describe

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<sup>39</sup> The 2016 Report conducted by the Society Against Sexual Orientation Discrimination (SASOD), "Suffering in Silence: Violence Against LBT Women in Guyana," highlights the widespread and systematic human rights violations experienced by LBT women in Guyana. This Guyana based, non-governmental organization and movement is dedicated to addressing discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity in Guyana.

<sup>40</sup> This conclusion is based off of limited availability of reliable data in the region, and may not accurately reflect the extent to which feminicide and gender violence occurs in other contexts in Latin America and the Caribbean. This is particularly true for the Caribbean region, in which feminicide is not legislated in the region.

the killing of women in Guatemala as a political term that conceptually references more than the act of femicide, but rather the convergence of individual and structural forces that permeate the state and judicial bodies. For Stanford, feminicide “helps to disarticulate belief systems that place violence based on gender inequality within the private sphere...and reveals the very social character of the killing of women as a product of relations of power between men and women.” (Stanford 2008: 12). The normalization of patriarchal forms of relations, misogyny, and the lack of political will of the state to investigate and prosecute cases of gender and sexual violence enables the pervasiveness of this phenomenon. However, as anthropologist and feminist-scholar Sarah Ihmoud rightfully argues, while the term underscores state complicity, its conceptualization operates from an undifferentiated notion of the universal woman and does not account for intersecting axis of difference (2011: 8). The notion of a universal womanhood assumes a shared experience along the lines of race, class and gender lines.

I draw from and build on the work of these feminist scholars to examine how the state’s increased attention and visibility of violence against women in the Guyanese context continues to reside within the discursive domain and does not in fact reflect any substantive attempts to address gender and sexual violence on the ground. Within these discourses, much of which has revolved around upholding Guyanese women’s rights to a “good life,” I contend two things: the first, even as pressure from local grassroots organizations and NGOs on the state has increased external pressure from international governing bodies, the state’s response, in the form of policy and awareness campaigns, continues to operate from a neoliberal logic through the lens of individual *responsibilization*. Secondly, the state has

almost exclusively focused on rural hinterland and the indigenous women as the quintessential victim of sexual exploitation, namely trafficking in persons (TIP) cases, even as it propagates a universal feminist human rights framework that purports to seek gender equity across socioeconomic and ethnic difference. Attending to the discursive and racial-sexual representations of African, Indian, and Amerindian women, specifically how these particular subject positions are made visible/invisible through the state's responses, highlight how geopolitical conditions extend structures of heteropatriarchal power through legal measures. For example, the pressure placed on the Guyanese government by the US government to comply with its Trafficking Victims Protection Act by adequately addressing human trafficking according to its standards and the subsequent designation of Guyana as a non-compliant country in June 2004. While the framework of human rights is seen as a universal framework and umbrella term to encapsulate sweeping societal problems, under which gender violence is situated, its uncritical adoption and implementation elides specific historical, political, and racial geographies unique to the Guyanese context. Further, the mobilization of the 'indigenous woman' in the state's narrative of indigenous peoples as quintessential victims elides the particularity of Afro- and Indo-Guyanese women's vulnerability. This indistinction, I contend, stems from particular images and "readings" of Amerindian, Black and Indian female bodies and their particular placement in relation to the state's neoliberal agenda. Further, it also linked their imagined (and real) positions in relation to access to land. As the hinterland is the site of internationally funded policies and development initiatives, indigenous territories that

reside within that geographical space and the peoples that dwell there, become mobilized in the service of national redemption.

Further, the Guyanese state's criminal and judicial system are largely ineffective in the protection of women in gender and sexual violence cases, with victims of gender violence often being directed to engage a juridical system that has an abysmal rate of conviction and the lack of resources for shelters and other social services. While femicide can be seen to function within the Guyanese context, it is just *one* aspect of the spectrum of violence in the Guyanese context. The United States Department Report on Human Rights for 2015 outlined high incidences of unreported cases of rape and sexual assault, in part due to fear of stigma, lack of confidence in authorities, retribution or further incurred violence (2015). Domestic violence over the past decades has ostensibly been a national priority in Guyana with the first recorded interest from the time of the adoption of the World Plan of Action in 1975 at the UN Conference on Women in Mexico City. Subsequent administrations adhered to several international agreements—the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; World Conference on Human Rights (Vienna Declaration and Platform for Action) and the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, including the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women (Convention of Belem do Para); Regional Action Programme for Latin American and Caribbean Women; and the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action). In addition to these conventions, the Guyanese state implemented a national strategy in the form of the National Policy on Domestic Violence in June 2007, under the



theme “Break the Cycle, Take Control.” The policy seeks "the transformation of attitudes that condone or normalize such violence such as gender stereotyping and discrimination.” Central to this campaign against domestic violence is the Domestic Violence Act of 1996 which implements numerous measures, among them, protection, occupation and tenancy orders and allowing for custody and maintenance, to name a few.

The 2015/2016 Amnesty International Report for Guyana noted persistent high levels of sexual and other physical violence against women and girls. According to a Latin American Public Opinion Project Survey published in 2014, there was widespread acceptance of domestic violence. Drawing from interviews conducted between 2006 and 2014, the survey solicited responses from at least 1,500 voting aged persons in each country each year. The Americas Barometer survey is conducted by LAPOP in more than 20 countries, including all of North, Central and South American, and the Caribbean. Carried out every two years, a total of 50,000 alone were interviewed in 2014. Respondents from the Guyanese context were asked whether they approved or did not approve of a man hitting his wife if she had been unfaithful. Relatedly, they were asked whether they would not approve but understood the abuse. The data demonstrated a relatively high level of acceptance in comparison to other countries in the Americas, with Guyana ranking third with 35.6%. Ranked above Guyana was El Salvador at 42.1% and Guatemala at the highest acceptance rate of 58%. In the following sections, I examine in greater depth the circulating racial-sexual ideas surrounding African, Indian, and Amerindian Guyanese women and how this is connected to questions of sexual availability, disposability, and desirability that render them vulnerable to bodily forms of violence.

## WOMEN YOU CAN DO ANYTHING TO

In thinking about the hypervisibility of this murdered and dismembered black Guyanese woman, I will recount a striking interview I conducted with a villager from Ann's Grove and his juxtaposition of the experiences of Creole African and Indian women in relation to indigenous women. A dark-skinned man with slightly graying locks, Rupert appeared to the casual observer a sharply dressed man, and when he became passionate about the topic at hand, waved his hands emphatically in short abrupt gestures that signaled the import of whatever he was speaking of in the moment. He spoke in a soft voice, peering through his glasses and sometimes over them, as if observing whether or not his point had been received. I had met Rupert on several occasions, the first time during a civil society forum on generating government accountability in the face of rampant corruption within the police force and the government and contesting the impunity with which violence against citizens and economic pilfering by elites occurred. When I introduced myself, and the research I was conducting, he eagerly agreed to meet with me.

The following week we agreed to meet at a local shop called *Coffeebean*. It was located in the bottom level of a cream cement house, cordoned off by a peeling wrought iron gate. Next door was a printer/copier center, which businesspeople and students from the university frequent, as it dually served as a convenient one stop location. I was slightly nervous to meet with Rupert, as my project had often been portrayed as decidedly anti-development and rearing the spectre of racial mistrust in troubling the racial landscape. My questions were often met with the preface "not to be racial, but..." which allowed me to

glimpse the hyperconsciousness surrounding race and its imbeddedness within a social imaginary of racial conflict and violence. Rupert had a very nuanced analysis of the relations between men and Amerindian, Indian and Black women. Interestingly enough, he never problematized what specific groups he included under the rubric of 'men,' whether it was Afro-, Indo-, or Amerindian men. Rather, he focused on how the images of women were always constructed within a larger racial hierarchy, in which Black and Amerindian women were situated at the bottom.

“Men see Amerindian, Indian, and Black women is different.” He began.

Black women, “you can do *anything* to,” and treat her however. For Guyanese men, Black, Indian, even ‘buck men’ view black women as sexually available in a way that they do not with Indian women. For instance, he said, you see how people view Indian women and will (at least publicly) treat her with a particular kind of respect. As he explained, Indian women were seen as more respectable, indeed more desirable in terms of phenotype for many men. Even more desirable were women of lighter complexion. He pointed at my darker skin.

“Black women are available for sex, but not to marry.” He described how, from his observations, an Indian man that will be with a black women will do so for a sexual relationship, but they will not marry them.” He added that ironically, these men might even father children with them and make beautiful “mixed” children, but more often than not they would not marry them for fear of reprisal from their family.

Black men will treat “their” women the same, he stated, but will pursue lighter skinned women or Indian or ‘dougl’a’ women.’ But for Rupert the treatment of Guyanese women had particular implications for Black and Amerindian women.

“Black women...and Amerindian women are exploited in a way that Indian women are not.” With Amerindian women, he says, they are trafficked and exploited and taken advantage of. “You got guys that go into the interior and again take advantage of the young indigenous girls, that create a lot of distrust. That’s where they say, ‘hear dem buck man do things to you, you hear them talk about it, you go trouble they daughter, sometime you can’t leave.” He explained that as a result, the racial/ethnic community of the perpetrator would be blamed, even stained by the individuals’ actions, reinforcing essentialist stereotypical representations.

“These guys [coastlanders] go in the bush, and this TIP [trafficking in persons] thing.... since the Indians start going in the bush, they got buck towns.” He explained that while African men were certainly involved in these establishments, they had been predominantly built and run by Indian men.

“They would start a club and bring these young girls to work, but they prostituting them once they’re there. I’ve never been, but the guys who have gone told me, ‘when you go in there, you set up there. The guy will ask you ‘you want one of the girls’ and they will send one to go sit. These are little Amerindian girls; they ain’t comin’ here to have no conversation. The guys would try to talk to them, but...basically they trying to figure out to see if one of them want to sleep with one of them. So, they got to pay guy a fee to take one of his girls.” He explained.

“This is in Georgetown?” I interjected softly.

“This is up in the east coast.” He named a well-known village and nods his head decisively. “So you see what’s happening, the Amerindian in the bush, he start exploiting the buck man and his daughters, now the buck man got trouble with mining because the miners are killing the fish, doing damage to the environment. So now *he’s* in a struggle. So, he don’t trust anybody that come into his environment, because you coming to exploit. So this system of exploitation which was driven by this last government, exploiting the Amerindians, the so-called indigenous peoples, to the point where’s there’s no trust. So when they hear they daughters, they can’t be happy.”

My conversation with Rupert revealed to me two key points. The first is that the representations of women within these coded notions of respectability, desirability, and availability functioned in very particular ways for differentially positioned Guyanese women. Furthermore, it worked to make the violence that these different women more and less visible. For example, the idea about respectability toward Indian women does not align with the jarring statistical prevalence of domestic violence and killings that continue to gain daily coverage in the news. As such, while respectability appears on its surface to imply respectable treatment, it belies the very violence Indian women experience. Secondly, the assertion that African and Amerindian women are specifically vulnerable may in fact have more to do with the way colonial sexual violence against these groups worked to maintain a colonial hierarchy that served connected, but distinct aims of the reproduction of enslaved bodies and the erasure of indigenous presence and sovereignty. In the next section, I examine how specifically the image of the Amerindians of the bush

works in tandem with the representation of the Amerindian ‘buck’ woman to normalize Amerindian exploitation.

### **THE “BUCK WOMAN”**

How the interior landscape is imagined, and how the bush takes shape within the national imaginary as a polarizing, redemptive space, is inextricably linked to the racial-sexual Amerindian female body. In the final section, I examine how the “bush” as a “space that bears the projection of man’s desire, like the woman’s body,” (Jackson 2005: 95) is constructed alongside the racial-sexual image of the ‘buck woman’ as a subjecting force over the landscape to be possessed. The term “buck,” a colonial image<sup>41</sup> of the Amerindian subject-as-less than human associates Amerindians with being closer to nature, indeed, intertwined with an uncivilized landscape. Where is the body-space of the Amerindian woman? Where do we find her in the landscape? And when we find her there, what does she say? These questions form the sites of inquiry, as I believe it bears meaning for the representation of indigenous women and where they are imagined to be located in the (land)scape, but raises pertinent questions about the placement of indigenous peoples as natural stewards of the land or “bush” in development discourse, yet peripheral to its actualization on the ground. If we follow these imaginaries to their embodied realities, we begin to see the contradictions and polarities, and the essentialist static boundaries that

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<sup>41</sup> Dutch colonizers referred to indigenous peoples as “buck” (bok), which means antelope or goat in Dutch. See Menezes, Mary Noel, *The Amerindians in Guyana, 1803-1873: A Documentary History* (London: Cass, 1979).

prevent the Amerindian subject from speaking in their own specific subjectivities, an identity that remains is obscured and managed by a governmentality that manages this difference.

The term “buck” stems from a spatial-temporal encounter between early Dutch colonizers in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and the Amerindians they termed “bok.” The term itself signals a matrix of meanings, not only for its underlying presupposition of innate embodiment of the natural environment, as “bok” roughly translates to mean deer, goat, or ram. “Bok,” or “buck” is understood locally as deer, or antelope. When I first learned of the origins of the term, I was struck by its implicit and explicit correlation between the “autochthonous” subject and the nimble, agile movements of the deer, both invocations of having quite literally sprung from the land and the Earth, but also for its gender-racial representations. The translation of “bok” reveals its gender-specific connotations, as its referential meaning is male deer, goat, or ram. Aside from the term “bok” woman being a semantic misnomer, instead of the word “geit,” it marks the racial and gendered valence of the term and ascriptions of inadequate femininity in relation to white (colonial) femininity.

The term has undergone new meanings on the part of indigenous personhood. Rather than solely a denigration of indigenous full humanity, as “backward” peoples at the bottom of a (re)scripted racial-spatial hierarchy, “buck peoples” also signals a simultaneous rejection and remaking in indigenous self-making processes. However, even within attempts to ascribe positive connotations to the term “buck,” its sexual-racial inflections and connections between sexuality, an almost animalistic prowess continue to cast indigenous peoples as other-than human. Often in my conversations with young men in the

villages, they would proudly identify as “buck boys” and “buck men,” demonstrating an agential aspect to recuperating terms meant to assert an image of Amerindian peoples as “backward,” “uncivilized,” and “underdeveloped,” all of the things presumed to be antithetical to coastlanders. Couched within these proclamations is the almost self-conscious assertion that buck peoples can endure “bush” life; of adapting to the challenges that arise from the constrained economic and social conditions of Amerindian life. This notion of durability and being withstanding subjugation and exploitation, in particular sexual exploitation, was a commonly expressed sentiment.

One afternoon in one of the village’s shops, I sat on a turquoise wooden bench “gyaffing,” the shade cast by the thin zinc roof providing minimal protection from the heat radiating through it. Known as ‘Uncle David’ in the village, he was one of several black residents in the Amerindian village, identified for his rumbling voice and impressive stature. He had worked for several decades in various parts of the interior. Perfunctorily, he described the limited occupations available to residents; although mining was the dominant form of labor for many men in the village, it was often on a small-scale level or as individual ‘pork knockers,’ and while the village owned a small logging concession ‘it was not possessed’ properly. With a tilted head, he explained that some of the women, predominantly middle-aged and older, worked individual farms, as there was no designated communal farms. Many of the young women in the village did not work outside of the household, and largely depended on the income generated by their partners’ labor in the backdam, whether as boat captains, shunting fuel, or part of mining or logging operations. According to him, the impacts of mining on the community could be characterized as



cycles of ‘cohesion and disruption.’ Men remained home in between the typical six-week mining cycle and when mining work became less readily available. As such, women often bore the brunt of maintaining the household.

When I asked him about his thoughts on the experiences of women in the hinterland, he acknowledged the prevalence of sexual violence, rape, and domestic abuse, yet paused when I asked about the nation’s growing attention to trafficking in persons (TIP) cases, viewed as an impediment to national progress. His eyes obscured behind dark shades, his shoulders rose and fell with his deep breathing. He conceded that while there were incidences of trafficking, the majority of cases actually comprised women who voluntarily ‘picked fare’ in the backdam. Although there were under-aged girls who left school or ran away from home, he attributed this as a consequence of extreme conditions of poverty, which sometimes led parents to ‘encourage their young daughters to work bush,’ where ‘advantage’ might happen. He readily acknowledged that while ‘predators’ further exploited these women and girls, the situation was misrecognized as coerced prostitution or unwilling sex work. ‘After a time the sex part doesn’t mean nothing because she get customed to it, she body suit...’ He motioned with his hands, outward and in, a tightening gesture that conjured a feminine silhouette. ‘She body become[s] accustomed to it.’ With a resigned expression, he noted that from ‘time memorial,’ prostitution formed ‘part of the thing [mining]...entertainment and dem thing would always happen.’ Prostitution constituted a part of ‘bush work,’ which belied gendered and sexualized notion of the female body as an important aspect of the entertainment for miners alongside the

prevalence of sporting (drinking), drug trafficking, and crime<sup>42</sup>. Other residents, women and men alike, shared similar sentiments about the presence of women in the backdam as being associated with sexual availability.

What does it mean for the female body to be perceived as predisposed— even ‘suited’ – for sexual labor and exploitation as a composite part of working the bush? In tandem with the overidentification of the ‘bush’ as a productive cultural or economic resource of the state, these ambivalent imaginaries of the space of the bush are imbued with colonial feminization of the interior as a space to subdue, tame, and beat back. As bodies are maps of power and identity (Haraway 1991; Lefebvre 1992), examining the discursive representations of Amerindian women reveals the way gendered and racialized identities become reproduced and expressed as natural; in turn, this process shapes how particular bodies are treated. Notably, perceptions about Amerindian women cannot be extricated from the racial-sexual representations of Afro- and Indo-Guyanese women, and the pervasive heteropatriarchal violence women experience across difference. As Linda Peake and Alissa Trotz argue, the reproduction of racialized identities relies on gendered practices and representations that are constituted and challenged across various sites (Peake and Trotz 1999). Although their analysis primarily attends to the representational construction of Indo and Afro-Guyanese women, this work provides a way to read the mapping and placement of the Amerindian woman as crucial to not only how racial/ethnic

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<sup>42</sup> For an excellent analysis of the relationship on the circulating discourses surrounding women as “victims” or “voluntary agents” in the sex trade, see Ruth Goldstein, “Semiophors and Sexual Systems: the Circulation of Words and Women” *Pragmatics & Society* (2015)(6)(2): 217-239.

boundaries are maintained, but also the processes through which hierarchical social orders are reinscribed in relation to place and territory.

The circulation of the Amerindian woman as ‘buck’ and innately hyper-sexualized was reflected in the experiences a middle-aged Amerindian woman relayed to me. While attending a workshop in Georgetown addressing the issue of sexual violence and trafficking in persons, she described her dismay at overhearing another female participant state, ‘all buck women know to do is fuck, fuck, fuck...women in Guyana, especially Amerindian women, are treated like sexual objects.’ For the ‘buck woman,’ geographic domination is worked out through reading and managing her specific racial-sexual body. The view of women and girls as commodities is linked to the image of the sexualized "buck" woman as predisposed for sexual labor; as backward bodies marked as less than, they are then considered violable and ‘rapeable.’ By extension because they are perceived as extensions of the geographical space of the hinterland, Amerindian women (and lands) are imagined as exploitable.

Further, depictions of the Amerindian woman as the emblematic figure of trafficking cases obfuscates a complex analysis of the structural forms of exploitation and conditions Amerindian women encounter and, paradoxically, reinscribes a condition of hypervisibility and invisibility. Whether as “coerced prostitute,” voluntary sex worker, or “trafficked victim,” or a congruent conflation, the Amerindian “buck woman” becomes a floating signifier, an integral part of how the ‘bush’ is imagined as a landscape of cowboy lawlessness, disorder, and gratuitous violence and as a redemptive panacea of wealth and economic potential for the advancement of national development. Geopolitical divisions

between the coast and the hinterland prevent a more expansive understanding of TIP and sexual violence cases. This limited framework effaces the reality that coastlander women are also trafficked *into* the hinterland. Despite numerous reports of the disproportionate vulnerability of Amerindian and Afro-Guyanese women to sexual violence, these circulating discourses frame the coast as a neutral space,<sup>43</sup> hindering an intersectional analysis of gender and sexual violence more broadly. These violences cannot be understood only in terms of relations between coastlander men and Amerindian women, but also in terms of the gender-sexual relations that shape relations between Amerindian men and women and between Creole men and women. As Trotz demonstrates, the hinterland, and the Amerindian woman, come into the purview of the state as a means to create an environment amenable to foreign investment and funding from multilateral and bilateral creditors by addressing TIPs as a problem of the hinterland, one that “underscore[s] the legitimacy of the state machinery on both a local and international stage” (Trotz and Roopnaraine 2009: 19).

Moreover, underlining the ambivalence about whether trafficking in persons is actually misrecognized prostitution, is the assumption that bodies ‘picking fare,’ as impure and dirty ‘bad women’ are inviolable and unrapeable as it is seen by the dominant society that these bodies are incapable of integrity. Consequently, violence against Amerindian women is inextricably situated within sex/gender colonial hierarchies of power and post-independence hinterland development policies and neoliberal economic expansion. Cast as

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<sup>43</sup> Guyana Human Rights Association Report, “Getting Serious: Detecting and Protecting Against Crimes of Sexual Violence in Guyana.” (2007).

pathological, derivative effects of the moral degradation associated with mining, I argue that gender violence against Amerindian women is integrally related to her racial-sexual body (“buck woman”) as being a naturalized extension of the bush landscape.

The 2007 report conducted by the non-governmental agency based in Guyana, the Guyana Human Rights Association (GHRA), “Getting Serious: Detecting and Protecting Against Crimes of Sexual Violence in Guyana,” sought to identify whether or not it was feasible to provide a broader sketch of the characteristics of potential victims and predators in sexual violence crimes in Guyana by analyzing data contained in police files. Conducted in collaboration with the Guyana Police Force (GPF) and the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP), the third in a series of reports that forms part of a campaign to end sexual violence against women, which began with the first study in 2005 on low conviction rates<sup>44</sup>, followed by the 2006 report *Justice For Rape Victims: Reform of Laws and Procedures in Guyana*. The campaign also led to the dissemination of campaign materials to the broader public for education and awareness raising in schools, training institutions, youth groups, faith based and other community organizations to lobby for reform of rape laws and judicial procedures surrounding rape crimes; and “to mobilize women in local communities to create support groups for victims of sexual violence and their families” (2007:2). In addition to training manuals, public service announcements and mini-documentary on sexual violence produced by young people, some 25,000 discussion leaflets on the problem were distributed across various regions of Guyana.

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<sup>44</sup> Guyana Human Rights Association Report. “Without Conviction: Sexual Violence Cases in the Guyana Justice Process.” (2005).

Notably, while reported statistics of sexual violence highlight the extensive problem across all racial and ethnic groups in the Guyanese context, proportionate to the overall population of Guyana, Afro-Guyanese and Amerindian women are over-represented among reported cases of sexual violence. For the 2007 report, of the 120 cases examined, (44%) of the crimes were committed on persons of Afro-Guyanese descent, and (27%) of Indo-Guyanese descent. Mixed and Amerindian groups (13% each) and Portuguese (3%), with (92%) of the examined cases being females, with a total of (69%) of all female victims of sexual assault below the age of 16 years<sup>45</sup>. (92%) of the victims of sexual violence were female, and (8% male). Beyond identifying patterns and trends of sexual violence crimes, the 2007 Report aims to determine the feasibility of the Guyana Police Force (GPF) to establish a national system for housing and updating information of sexual offenders and of crimes of sexual violence. Building on previous conclusions from prior studies, this study emphasizes sexual violence as a major component of crime in Guyana, and affirms the need to substantively engage the problem at all levels of the state without devolving into what scholar McKinnon refers to as a “double-edged denial”<sup>46</sup> in which high levels of sexual offenses are considered too ‘extra-ordinary to be believed or so common-place as to induce complacency’ (3).

Similarly, the GHRA’s approach to documenting and examining sexual violence reflects a protectionist paradigm, with emphasis placed on building the capacity of the state

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<sup>45</sup> Figures compiled by Help and Shelter, another non-governmental agency adjusted for age categories for the same period revealed a striking similarity, at (76%).

<sup>46</sup> Catherine McKinnon. (2006). *Are Women Human?*. Harvard University Press, 419.

to address the issue. Furthermore, it revolves around the belief that informing women and girls to better protect themselves through ‘properly designed protection programmes’ will significantly reduce the incidence of sexual assault (3). As expected, the percentage of victims along geographical regions were preliminarily found in the capital Georgetown (26%) and Region 4 (20%), and reflects their dominant placement in the demographic population of the country with (41%)<sup>47</sup>. However, when accounting for the proportion to overall population, Region 1 and 2 stood out in contrast to Region 4. Despite constituting only 3% of the population, Region 1 accounts for 10% of sexual crimes, signaling rates of incidence at three times as much sexually violent crimes per head of population in Region 4 and Region 2 (13% crime, 7% population). With regards to the demographic of Amerindian victims of sexual violence, the study urges the need for particular attention to protection of young Amerindian girls, particularly in Region 1, an area in which they are more vulnerable to sexual abuse, with additional studies necessary to determine the specificities of that geographical context to understand the factors involved in why such high levels of sexual violence occur in Region 1. Based on these statistics, it likely that similar conditions in other interior regions may make Amerindian populations vulnerable to sexual violence, with the caveat that all of these figures generated by this particular study are a mere fraction of the overall actual incidents of sexual violence, as a mere one tenth of cases (a widely accepted figure) are reported to the police.

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<sup>47</sup> Office of the President, *Poverty Reduction Strategy—Progress Report 2005* (p. 6 population figures).

The report includes recommendations for further actions that can be developed to address the issues, including training programs that are tailored to the distinct groups of girls and young women, with programs specifically geared toward Amerindian females living in the interior regions to better protect themselves. Practical recommendations, such as creating conditions within police stations to facilitate better collection of characteristics of victims and accused perpetrators during initial statements, to the tabulation of this reports and data electronically to enable the continuous updating of crime information. Further, the report concludes with the strong recommendation for the GPF to ‘utilize their bi-lateral relation with police services...in the US and the UK, to access appropriate computer software to sustain routine collection of data pertinent to characteristics of victims and perpetrators of crimes of sexual violence’ (28). Many led by civil society and non-governmental organizations initiatives to understand the scope of gender and sexual violence and to address the issue in a meaningfully transformative manner continue to be hindered by the state, in particular its core interest in maintaining a national image amenable to foreign investors and development.

In concert with this hypervisibility of the Amerindian woman, and the elision of Afro- and Indo- women, is the figure of the prostitute, which I argue works to delegitimize the assertion that trafficking in persons is indeed a serious issue worthy of state intervention. Moreover, underlining the ambivalence of the extent of trafficking or whether it is a case of misrecognized prostitution, is the assumption that bodies ‘picking fare,’ as impure and dirty ‘bad women’ are inviolable and unrapeable as it is seen by the dominant society that these bodies are incapable of integrity. Consequently, violence against



Amerindian women is inextricably linked to colonial legacies of power and state neoliberal economic expansion. Reports of sexual violence are cast as pathological effects of the moral degradation of extractive industries, yet I argue that the experiences of Amerindian women experience are related to her racial-sexual body as being a naturalized extension of the land. The geographical distribution of particular groups unevenly, through racial-sexual and economical hierarchies and the ‘simultaneous naturalization of bodies and places’ must be unveiled and called into question if we want to think about alternative spatial practices, as the present landscape is ‘both haunted and developed by old and new hierarchies of humanness.’

As Katherine McKittrick poignantly states, ‘geographic domination, then, is conceptually and materially bound up with racial-sexual displacement’ (xvii). The uneven geographical distribution of particular groups, through colonial racial-sexual and economic hierarchies and the ‘simultaneous naturalization of bodies and places’ must be unsettled if we are to create and imagine decolonial land/body relationships, as the present landscape is ‘both haunted and developed by old and new hierarchies of humanness.’<sup>48</sup> In the contemporary Guyanese landscape, the *where* of indigenous geographies and indigenous subjectivities is disciplined through seemingly natural stabilities, of fixed boundaries and places, of naturalized ‘bush’ and ‘buck.’ As one Amerindian woman expressed to me during a workshop I conducted deconstructing these circulating representations: ‘These images of us as ‘buck’ and the idea that we can’t represent ourselves are not true...we are

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

beautiful, intelligent, and ... we are the First Peoples.’ Her refutation of these circulating representations signal self-making processes that reassert Amerindian living presence and self-determination as unevenly subjugated bodies, in particular the Amerindian woman, also constitute a body-space element of resistance to dominance.

### **NEOLIBERAL COMPLICITY AND GENDER VIOLENCE**

In May 2016, I met with the head of the organization, Jolene, for Red Thread Organization, a multi-racial non-governmental organization dedicated to advocating for the rights of women across axis of race, class, and geographic distance. Through the network of NGO organizations in Guyana, many of whom had collaborated with one another around the discourse of human rights, democracy, and the need to strengthen civil society or had partaken in workshops and trainings on issues such as gender equity, state accountability and grassroots mobilizing to address the disparities of impoverished communities. Similar to other NGOS, Red Thread was located in the centre of the capital of Georgetown, in an inconspicuous wooden house. The white paint, once a smooth encasement of the exterior walls of the two-floor house now peeled and flaked, the weathered wood underneath peeking through. Glass shutters lined the windows, expansive and lining the front of the house. I had visited their office at the beginning of my research fieldwork, and had met with the two female organizers, one an African middle-aged woman and the other a Indian woman whose short burgundy hair stood out in contrast to her light brown skin. Unlike during our previous meeting, I had a firmer sense of the direction of the research, in terms of the increasing importance gender and gender violence specifically linked with my

original focus on land rights struggles for Amerindian communities. Specifically, I was interested in learning more about what the organization perceived as the causes of violence against women and to what extent the issue resonated with the state—to what degree had the state and the former and current government sought to address the pervasive occurrence of gender violence. In relation to the specificity of trafficking in persons, I wanted to grasp some of the local understanding of the ambiguity about the extent to which it registered as an actual issue, and why indigenous woman and indigenous communities were imagined as the site and epicenter of those affected.

It did not take long to meet with Jolene, a handsome woman that appeared in her late 50s, early 60s, salt and peppered hair neatly trimmed to a close cropped hair cut. She was neatly dressed in a button down shirt and slacks, and peered at me from behind wire-rimmed glasses with noticeable interest. I had been ushered into the office by the Indian organizer I had previously met, who did not show any outward signs of recognizing me from our previous meeting. She had ushered me in to have a seat to a table placed near the row of windows overlooking the front of the office, where passing breeze flowed into the room. I sat and waited until Jolene came to sit at the table. Nodding after hearing about my research and the questions I hoped she might be able to help me understand, she explained that in 2000 much of the conversation around trafficking in persons became highly visible. Red Thread, she stated, had tried to ensure that the image of trafficking was not the Amerindian woman and that it was in fact more visible on the coast. However, she continued, even as they are the most visible group they are definitely more vulnerable because of lack of economic jobs and education within their respective communities. The

majority of the time the most visible incidence occurred in the Northwest Region, in which trafficking formed a “straight line” from Charity to Georgetown. The work the Red Thread organization has carried out over the past several decades, through grassroots organizing allowed them to observe how Indian and black women less likely to track into the interior. “And now, attention to trafficking...brought to the limelight” and the situation further “dramatized” by the Guyana Women Miners Organization (GWMO), in which mostly women of African descent “rescued” from mining camps, including young children.

The previous administration, she explained, had been bent on denying trafficking as an actual issue; however, the international pressure from the United States was the impetus of the state to address the issue because of its “own agenda.” Complicating the issue further was the fact that Venezuelan and Brazilian women are also trafficked but labeled as “illegal” because there is less money than trafficking. According to her, the government has been “paying lip service to people that have been trafficked.” She shifted in her chair, and paused before continuing. Part of the inattention to the root cause of gender and sexual violence stemmed from “seeing women’s rights as disenfranchising men,” hindering any progress toward addressing the issue beyond a broader logic of “pandering” to public concerns, including the organization. She named the existing Men’s Affairs Bureau as representative of the stronghold of this rhetoric, and other religious organizations (primarily Christian men) that have put forth the argument that “the problem of the situation is men must take their role of leadership.”

The state’s impetus to accept these measure stems out of operating in the interest of the state: maintaining funding streams and support from external funding agencies like

the IMF and the World Bank. “*This* is what is pushed by the United States...to accept these measures they are proposing. This logic is very firmly plugged into the neoliberal model,” She stated gravely. Rather, efforts at educating Amerindian villages reduced the problem to awareness and educational campaigning, rather than a more holistic approach that addressed not only the economic conditions that made women and girls vulnerable to sexual exploitation or forced them into the position where they could be inadvertently trafficked into the interior as prostitutes. “If the problem is economic, we need to set up industries and local community development,” and from there “sensitization makes sense,” she contended. The conversation I had with Jolene illuminated how the centralization of the Amerindian subject in the discourse and national efforts to address trafficking and person is not only related to the strategic logics of the state, but also reveals how state responses continue to reflect the overarching neoliberal paradigm that undergirds development toward the hinterland. As such, the hinterland figures within the coastal imaginary for what Alissa Trotz calls its “redemptive possibilities” (Trotz & Roopnaraine 2009: 1). Further, it reveals how the discourse of rights and equality merely supported and extended gender violence, while veiling the structuring colonial heteropatriarchy and complicity of the state.

This chapter has examined the mutually constitutive relationship between the racial-sexual imaginaries surrounding Guyanese women as a site of ongoing heteropatriarchal and colonial structures of violence. These representations render Amerindian, African, and Indian women to particular notions of respectability, availability and disposability. In particular, this chapter has focused on the specificity of violence

enacted against on the bodies of black and Amerindian women as part of a much larger historical formation of gendered dispossession. The differentiated and specific violence indigenous and Creole women experience, and the state's responses to redressing this violence, also reflect their respective positioning in relation to the state and territory.

Notably, the mobilization of the Amerindian figure as the quintessential victim of trafficking and person, emerges as the hinterland become a position of intense national economic concern given pressures from the United States and other international organization to address the issue. Thus, the hinterland and its communities become mobilized as a “redemptive space” for the progression of the coast, which reveals the continuities of colonial projections toward the hinterland and Amerindian peoples. This colonial relationship, which renders indigenous lands precarious to state capture and exploitation through legal and spatial (re)orderings is one that is fundamentally related to the body—embedded colonial ideas that simultaneously place and displace. As I have argued in the beginning of the dissertation, attending to the enabling conditions of indigenous dispossession also meant tracing its entanglement with colonial legacies of slavery and indentureship. In the conclusion, I will offer a discussion on these colonial entanglements—indigenous dispossession, slavery, and indentured servitude— that continue to structure the Guyanese political landscape, its national anxieties over territorial nationalism, and the management of indigenous sovereignty. Drawing from my argument on the interrelated nature of gender and sexual violence between Creole and Amerindian women Guyana, this chapter also examines how postcolonial and settler colonial theoretical frameworks reproduce structures of alterity between blackness and indigeneity.

On the one hand, postcolonial frameworks continue to perpetuate the marginalization and erasure of indigenous living presence, whereas settler colonial frameworks do not adequately grapple with the particularity of blackness and anti-blackness in the Caribbean and as a global shaping force. I conclude by attempting to think through how we may generatively examine these colonial legacies in order to envision more expansive notions of liberation and freedom and relations to the land, as well as areas of the work I would like to explore in future research more broadly.

## Conclusion: Looking For Free, Envisioning Decolonial Futures

When we find ourselves on this land  
Toiling or folding into the soil  
What do we see

When we find ourselves dreaming up  
Liberation  
Who do we see  
Did the black and red shiny skin absorb the light  
Refracting the sweat and tears as one  
Did we forget the names and the places

Of

Creeks and riverbeds  
That had bore more than pacified syllables  
Bush  
That now scrap the tongue

Were you constrained or did you move freely  
Were you granted back the land  
By those who had stolen it  
Allowed to have relations with its rhythms

Of ebb and flow  
Of life and death

Can you see beyond the space of death  
Beyond what they left us  
Can you imagine differently  
The landandbody  
The landandbody

Which

Exceeds mere abstraction

Is the spirit spoken in hushed tones or  
Ushered to the front  
Is the female body included?



Is the queer body included?  
Is the indigenous body included?  
Is the black body included?

Is this freedom premised on omission  
On silences  
On complacency and complicity  
On siphoning our creative imaginaries  
that

Clamor freedom  
Clamor for the space to maneuver  
Circling around to the ancestral work transferred  
To us

Writing is the invocation of embodied memory. Writing ethnography and poetry releases that which no longer serves, but also conjures up from spaces of pain and trauma other possibilities. I reflect on the “end” of this writing journey in much the same way that I began—incorporating another language, through the form of poetry, to point to questions (and pathways) that in some ways exceed the theoretical language we have available. Beyond a scholarly endeavor, this manuscript examines how the land and the body becomes a site onto which colonial legacies are mapped, which has specific manifestations and implications for the gendered female and queer body, which paradoxically become mobilized in hypervisible and invisible ways. As a queer black and indigenous woman, this work demanded navigating my own embodied trauma and desire as engaged researcher, as kin, as “sisters we do not know,” as a traveler of the diaspora called home. Fundamentally, this work speaks to an embodied assembling of contradictions and inconvenient truths, of attesting to related, yet distinct specificities of indigenous and black dispossession in terms of unique system of indentureship, without devolving into narratives that situate one particular group as the quintessential oppressor or victim.

This embodied work has meant attempting to trace and hold in tension the tangled living histories that shape the Guyanese landscape, of the colonial structures that dispossess indigenous lands and relational ways of being, and of property regimes established on the fulcrum of black social death that locate black being in a perpetual place of non-belonging as perpetually dislocated subjects against which the system of indentureship was constructed. While British system of indentureship sought to contain East Indian labor to the plantation, through policies that constricted their movement, it also allowed for their

gradual acquisition of propertied land (Mohammed 2008), while making it difficult, if impossible for freed African slaves to establish villages in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This created a structure of relationships that shape the relationship between African and Indian peoples, which elite politicians continue to capitalize on in order to secure their ethno-political power base. In addition, during this period enslaved Africans were prevented from establishing maroon communities, as is well-documented in other parts of the Caribbean and South America (Thompson 2006; Lucena 2005; Price 1996 [1973]), due to the participation between Dutch and later, British colonizers in the capture of runaway Africans fleeing to the hinterland. This chapter provides an overview of the core arguments of this dissertation and concludes with a discussion on the limitations of the theoretical framework of settler colonialism in grappling with the tensions and contradictions of slavery, indentureship, and conquest in the Guyanese context. Thus, this final chapter, in the very questions it engages also sketches the outlines of future work, toward imagining decolonial futures.

## **DISSERTATION OVERVIEW**

Chapter One, “A Country of Wolves Will Always Have Sheep” maps the racially bifurcated political landscape that has engendered political instability and racial violence in Guyana. Rather than the exception, ethnic/political conflict has become the norm and competition for control of the state has become the battlefield. This has created conditions under which a “winner-takes-all” approach to politics have led to authoritarian regimes that allows the group in power to determine how political, economic, and cultural resources are

distributed. As Guyanese scholar-activist David Hintz contends, “ethnicity has been the dominant factor in shaping the country’s political evolution” (2010: xi), where Creole descendants of formerly enslaved Africans and indentured East Indian laborers have been engaged in political struggle for control of the state for much of its fifty years of post-independence.

This seeming gridlock prompted him to call for the need for national reconciliation and an examination of the country’s ethnic politics in the period of democratization beyond the 1992 national elections when the PNC Forbes Burnham regime lost its control in what was widely accepted as a return to functioning democracy. Despite this shift from authoritarian to ostensibly more democratic rule, ethno-politics continue to be the order of the day. The call for reconciliation and inclusionary democracy by the historic multiracial APNU-AFC coalition and the discourses that surrounded this moment pointed to a need for healing. Yet, as this chapter argued, the national imperatives of reconciliation and national healing merely reproduce the marginalization of indigenous peoples in its elision of the struggles as *political* subjects. This is represented in the government’s projections toward the hinterland as an ambivalent space— of disorder, wealth, and freedom. Further, it reveals the undergirding logics of neoliberal governance toward the hinterland and its communities as a redemptive space for national development that would provide the “good life” for all Guyanese citizens. Thus, attempts at national reconciliation and inclusionary democracy remain predicated on indigenous sacrifice recast as inclusion, raising significant questions about the terms upon which indigenous subjects are situated in the nation-building project.

Chapter Two, “Colonial Regimes of Legality and the Amerindian Act” outlines the state’s recognition policy toward indigenous Amerindian communities, beginning with a genealogical background on the Dutch and British colonial policies that form the basis of the contemporary Amerindian Act of 2006. In tandem with a recognition policy that reconfigures indigenous governance, this chapter argues that collective land titling processes have effectively diminished large swathes of indigenous territory. Although indigenous communities ostensibly have land tenure security through the most recent amendment, contested titling and demarcation practices, and the granting of mining and logging concessions, have placed indigenous communities within precarious positions. Through discourses of “good governance” and amenability the state manages indigenous challenges to recognition policy, even as it remains the arbitrator of the extent to which indigenous rights are implemented and protected. Thus, while the recognition policy is touted as a transformational change from the colonial violence and paternalism of the past, it merely extends an unequal relation of power that subsumes indigenous rights according to neoliberal economic expansion, placing them within what I call a space of corporeal-spatial precarity. Further, this chapter ultimately illustrates how colonial regimes of legality enable indigenous land dispossession and constrain indigenous self-determination efforts.

Chapter Three, “Dis Land is We Own,” examines how Amerindian villages within the Region 7, Lower Mazaruni-Cuyuni region negotiate the state’s contradictory policy of developing a “green economy,” e.g. the Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS) program, which aims to stem forest degradation and deforestation in exchange for funding support from Norway and other multilateral funding, while also expanding the extractive

industries, like mining. These state-sponsored initiatives toward the hinterland and its predominantly Amerindian communities have had significant impacts on their economic and social livelihoods, disrupting local village economies such that mining has become the sole source of employment for indigenous peoples. It also reveals the inherently gendered aspects of the impacts of mining on indigenous bodies, not only on the health impacts of contaminated waters but also the increasing vulnerability of indigenous women to gender and sexual violence and other forms of exploitation. This chapter does not aim to reproduce representations of the “ecological Indian,” whereby the Amerindian subject is the natural steward of the land, as Amerindian people also participate within the mining sector. Rather, it points to the delimited possibilities of indigenous self-determination, even as it reveals how indigenous notions of Amerindian development reproduce, contest, and disrupt the imposition of neoliberal models. It illustrates how asserting indigenous sovereignty over titled lands remains a precarious reality for many Amerindian communities. The imperative of many communities remains the central concern of sustaining indigenous livelihoods and imaginatively thinking of ways to reproduce indigenous futures. This chapter centers the mundane and the everyday space of indigenous struggles for land and self-determination in the “bush,” in order to make visible that which is so abstract for many Creole Guyanese that predominantly reside on the coast, but to also reveal how state initiatives purporting to center indigenous voices advance a neoliberal agenda that frames indigenous peoples as what Marjo Lindroth calls “biopolitical collectivities.”

Chapter Four, “(Dis)remembering the Dead: ‘Buck’ and ‘Black’ Women and Gendered Colonial Violence,” explores the gendered aspects of the state and non-state

techniques and mechanisms that are carving out indigenous lands, revealing the connections between gender, territory, and the body. State sanctioned processes of dispossession, I argue, operate in tandem with the racial-sexual representation of the indigenous female “body,” which manifests in the gendered violence to which they are subjected. By examining the racial-sexual image of the “buck woman,” imagined as naturalized extension of the “bush” or hinterland, I argue that the racialized, gendered and sexualized imaginaries at play engender sexual and gender violence against indigenous women and girls. Examining the case of spectacular violence against an African woman, this chapter traces how the black female body also incited discourses around the metaphoric collective social and political dismemberment of the Guyanese landscape. This chapter suggests that reading this moment beyond being an example of moral degradation and political instability that haunts Guyana, it reveals the dismembering forces of colonialism that is inherently gendered and functions on the female body and the land.

Further, this chapter argues that the violence indigenous women experience, as a racial and gendered process of dispossession, relates to broader gender violence enacted against African and East Indian Guyanese women, as a spatial and bodily spectrum of violence. Local grassroots women organizations like Red Thread have argued for an intersectional lens to addressing gender violence across racial difference, in which experiences of African, Indian, and Amerindian women are understood as relational. However, state approaches to addressing pervasive gender violence, in particular trafficking in persons, continue to mobilize the indigenous woman and the hinterland space as the primary site and victims of trafficking in persons (TIP) cases. This is in part due to

the state's move to be compliant with the US Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA), which places countries on a tier list that indicate governments that fully comply with its directive in order to secure its funding from multilateral development agencies. Similarly, the indigenous female body becomes hypervisible through these state discourses, yet elides a more nuanced engagement with the structural conditions that sustain indigenous sociopolitical marginalization, land struggles, and increased vulnerability to economic exploitation and bodily violences. As such indigenous land and bodies only appear when mobilized as redemptive possibilities for national development.

This dissertation has sought to weave together how state and non-state techniques of power and regimes of legality that undergird land titling practices have worked together to diminish indigenous territories, rendering them vulnerable to extractive industries like mining and situating the hinterland as a testing ground for “environmentally friendly” development policies that sustain neocolonial interests. These processes operate in tandem with representations of the body, situating indigenous peoples within what I have called a space of *corporeal-spatial precarity*. In the subsequent chapter, I examine how this concept of corporeal-spatial precarity, of *landandbody* precarity and dispossession, has been taken up in the literature in indigenous studies increasing through the framework of settler colonialism.

## **ON THE QUESTION OF SETTLER COLONIALISM**

On March 26, 2017, the executive governing body for Amerindian toshaos, the National Tashaos Council (NTC), in conjunction with the Guyanese Organization of



Indigenous Peoples (GOIP) and the Amerindian Peoples Association (APA) released a joint statement that rejected the government's move to create a Commission of Inquiry to investigate all issues surrounding the individual, joint, or collective ownership of lands acquired by free Africans and Amerindian land titling claims. The collective statement cited a lack of FPIC consultation with indigenous communities and organizations in the creation of the commission as a mechanism to address indigenous land issues. The NTC in its press statement avowed:

Guyana's First Peoples, as a core group of people with a very unique status in Guyana, and having lived on this land for time immemorial, view it as an aberration that needs to be recalled and have established, two separate entities to deal with the issues currently placed under such a blanket. The severe lack of consultations, non-FPIC compliant, and the mere fact that a unilateral decision can be made on behalf of the Indigenous Peoples of Guyana in such a manner are most concerning. This is clearly viewed as a blatant attempt in trying to dispossess the Indigenous Peoples of our lands and we cannot condone such an attempt. While we support Reparations and Repatriation of African Lands and addressing that issue with a great degree of urgency, the Indigenous Lands issue cannot and should not be viewed in the same light, nor can it be addressed under the same framework.

The statement on its surface reveals the ongoing unequal relations of power between the state and indigenous peoples, such that indigenous participation and inclusion in redressing land rights is mitigated through the state's role as arbitrator of the extent to which those rights are exercised. But, the statement also points to fundamental concerns around the axis of land for both indigenous and African communities, and the need to grapple with the distinct basis upon which claims to land for each group are possible. Curiously, it also raises the need to examine the specificity of indigenous and black dispossession and their

respective positions in relation to state power and its efforts toward reconciliation of ongoing colonial legacies.

I return to my earlier ethnographic discussion from the final chapter, to consider why and how, beyond geographical distance between the coast and hinterland, much of the scholarship on Guyana, and the Caribbean more broadly perpetuates, to borrow from Peter Wade, “structures of alterity” between understandings of black and indigenous dispossession. I foreground this act of spectacular violence to trace the way gender/sexual violence are constitutive sites of colonial power and relations in post independence Guyana. Rather than an anomaly, her murder reflects the constitutive gendered and sexualized violence enacted against Creole women, as colonial continuities that mark the Guyanese landscape.

This discussion is generative ground not only in examining the vexed question of belonging and claims to land, but also foregrounds how dispossession is inherently a gendered. Thus, it is not only a question of what political redress is possible for dispossession of indigenous lands, but also of the body. In other words, what does redress look like for the body, in particular the black and Amerindian female body? Given the disproportionate cases of sexual violence to which these groups are exposed, this is not a rhetorical question.

Ultimately, this is a meditation on the racial-sexual body—the territory of the black Creole and indigenous female bodies in particular—continue to function as sites of exploitation, processes of deterritorialization and land dispossession for the expansion of the nation-state, through attendant gendered heteropatriarchal violence. Conceptualized

as disparate experiences, I argue that these violences relate to broader gender violence against Creole Guyanese and indigenous women that may be better understood along a spatial and bodily spectrum of violence. From an intersectional lens that examines the racial-sexual bod(ies) underling so-called (post)colonial governance, we might better grapple with the legacies of indigenous marginalization and antiblackness that mark the Caribbean, and Guyana specifically. I focus on the position(s) of the indigenous and black Creole woman because it points to the structural underpinnings of colonialism—slavery and indigenous dispossession—against which the system of indentureship is constructed.

Further, these positions pose significant questions for conceptualizing the “colonial entanglements” between indigenous peoples and “arrivant” populations—those descendants displaced from their own indigenous lands and brought to new ones— which emerging settler colonial scholarship and indigenous studies attempts to do. As such, I critically reflect on the convergence of what Sylvia Wynter refers to as “racialized specificities” and the collision of slavery and conquest, what Winona LaDuke has called “twin horizons of death,” in particular how we understand the question of blackness and the ways legacies of bondage and violence persist into the present moment.

Conceptualized as disparate experiences, the “buckwoman” and the Creole woman reflect the ways racialized hierarchies become enacted upon the sites of the female body; thus, my work questions how and why they continue to be conceptualized through separate lenses. For the indigenous “buck woman,” a Dutch colonial term for a male deer, geographic domination is worked out through reading and managing her specific racial-sexual body, as less-than human linked to the image of the sexualized “buck” woman as

predisposed for sexual labor; as backward bodies marked as less than, they are then considered violable and rapeable. Theoretical work needs to account for the gendered violence enacted not only against indigenous women, which I argue function as an extension of projected representation of indigenous territory, or bush, what anthropologist Terrence Roopnaraine calls a ambivalent space, but also for the gratuitous violence enacted against Creole, in particular black women. The brutal murder of the aforementioned Afro-Guyanese woman cannot be understood in isolation, but in tension with the conditions structuring indigenous women livelihoods.

Thus, my overall discussion with respect to settler colonialism is two-fold: (1) To reveal the conceptual and theoretical blindspots of settler colonial's scholarship regarding the black female body in settler processes, and; (2) how this elision is in part due to settler colonial's conceptualization of race and misrecognition of blackness that in part, produces what I call *ontological inevitability*; (3) the need for a relational framework that conceptualizes the time-space of the plantation/conquest and the creation of a decolonial embodied praxis that does not reproduce incognito investments in whiteness. I begin with a brief overview of the ways settler colonial scholarship and indigenous studies have grappled with the structural ontology of blackness in its articulation of conquest/slavery/colonialism. Lorenzo Veracini (2011) outlines in the inaugural issue of the settler colonial studies journal, the structures of settler colonialism continue to have institutional power from the perspective of the indigenous; the colonizer's driving imperative of the colonized "you, work for me," whereas the settler colonizer commands, "you, go away." Rather than a distant occurrence, settler colonialism flags the ways that

colonial relations of power continue to shape and inform existing power regimes, fortified and reinforced by colonial, racial, and imperial logics (the sovereignty of the colonizer, and later the nation-state). As Tuck and Yang posit, the slave in settler contexts figures as a “desirable commodity” and site of exploited labor; the violence enacted upon their bodies ensured their dislocation from the land as the slave’s person is settler property—a violence of “keeping/killing the chattel slave [that] makes them deathlike monsters in the settler imagination” (2012: 6). Scholars have taken up settler colonialism to examine how non-white, non-indigenous peoples that arrived to indigenous territories under conditions of slavery and indentured servitude enact settler forms of power that displace indigenous peoples (Matsuda 2010; Hokulani 2010; Fujikane 2000; Veracini 2011). Others have relegated people of color to the status of Settler (Tuck and Yang 2012; Lawrence and Dua 2005), by the mere fact of living and owning land appropriated from indigenous peoples and “exercising and seeking rights collectively denied to Indigenous Peoples” (Snelgrove et. al 2014).

Jodi Byrd’s excellent work on the tensions between postcolonial and indigenous scholarship provides an important intervention on the limitations of postcolonial scholarship in the Guyanese context (2011). Byrd and Rothberg (2011)<sup>49</sup> argue that while there are points of convergence between postcolonial and indigenous studies, insofar as they each seek to challenge the logics of colonialism (this is most apparent in the seminal work by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak”), there is also an

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<sup>49</sup> Byrd, Jodi A. and Michael Rothberg. (2011). “Introduction: Between Subalternity and Indigeneity: Critical Categories for Postcolonial Studies.” *Interventions* 13(1):01-12.

“uncompleted dialogue” that reveal critical points of tension between these two bodies of scholarship from the perspective of indigenous experiences. For indigenous peoples, there are the lived realities and experiences of living under ongoing structural colonial projects. She argues for the need to critically interrogate subalternity and postcolonial scholarship’s dependence on models of colonialism in South Asia and Africa that do not necessarily account for the settler colonies of the Americas, Australia and New Zealand. As Robert Warrior demonstrates in his analysis of the relations between his work and postcolonial theory, “grounds for working together already exist” (Warrior 2006).

This “uncompleted dialogue” between postcolonial and indigenous studies stems, in part, from the question of temporality in the periodizing “post’ in postcolonial and the suggestion that colonialism has ended, which has been discussed at length by scholars of indigeneity and colonialism (e.g. McClintock 1992; Smith 1999; Womack, Weaver, and Warrior 2006). Thus, as Byrd and Rothberg suggest, in order for there to be a meaningful dialogue between these bodies of literature, a notion of incommensurability must be centralized in the indigenous/subaltern dialogue. Others have described their position under the rubric of arrivants (Byrd 2011). Shona Jackson’s recent work (2012) examines this indigenous/subaltern dialogue through a complicated dance of signaling the subjection of the subaltern Creole to colonial and imperial forces, while also examining their participation in and complicity with the settler colonial project through the erasure of indigenous sovereignty.

Drawing on this emerging scholarship, Shona Jackson foregrounds the context of Guyana to show how Creoles may enact a mode of being and subjectivity as subaltern

settlers through “techniques of settler belonging” (2012: 61) as the basis for their claims to being Human. Jackson’s (2012) critical work on "creole indigeneity" not only brings a much-needed cross-disciplinary engagement with Caribbean, postcolonial, and Indigenous scholarship, it (re)centers the Circum-Caribbean as indigenous space, geographically imagined as ground zero for the legacies of slavery, conquest, and indigenous annihilation. The region’s narrative of indigenous erasure in the Caribbean reproduces what Caribbean scholar Melanie Newton rightfully calls “the imperial colonial narrative.” Notably, Jackson’s work complicates polarized framings of diaspora and indigeneity, examining how displaced or Creole subjects make claims to being "indigenous" in a context where prior indigenous peoples already exist, illustrated in their struggles for control of the state. Suggestively, she argues that these claims are predicated upon colonial notions of laboring the land (specifically the plantation), or sweat equity, a re-deployment of Eurocentric colonial models that displace indigenous Amerindians and relations to the land. As such, “the plantation works as a governing epistemology whether or not one was on it,” thus, “blacks become new colonizers and seek to bind Indigenous Peoples to a laboring epistemology that they control” (2012: 97).

She continues that creole’s ontology of labor extends the colonial Hegelian master/slave dialectic through attempts to create a social being outside of the ontological position of Slave, rewriting what Sylvia Wynter calls the “governing codes” for humanity, thus extending Western conceptions of *the* Human as determined by the colonial master. Paradoxically, as Jackson argues, by asserting their claims to a new modernity in which conquest has emptied the land of its aboriginal peoples, (e.g. the figure of Caliban in

Caribbean mytho-poetics and scholarship, as the *new native*), this relationship continues to lock blacks into notions of the Human fundamentally predicated on their subjugation. That is, the postcolonial project and the so-called independence period merely extends the structuring force of settler colonial expansion, as *subaltern settlers*: “despite invocation of Indigenous Peoples, appropriation of the native by the state is anti-indigenous precisely because it occurs within the new basis for articulation, a teleology of modern labor” (2012: 147). It is the affirmation of this teleology of labor that affirms anti-blackness by valorizing blackness as that which performs labor for European humanity, and thus, for the humanity of the black self” (2012: 2).

However, the tethering of the black subject, in particular, to the state and a laboring ontology misrecognizes the character of racial slavery, and how we might grapple with the fundamental anti-black character of the state. Afropessimist scholarship grapples with the particularity of racial slavery, which Jared Sexton argues forms the “fulcrum upon which the Human, or in this instance the Settler/Master/Human comes to know itself” (Sexton 2016; Wilderson 2010). That is, as Saidiyah Harman has argued the “afterlife of slavery,” and the continual negation of blackness is apparent in the ways black social death is paramount in liberal conceptualizations of freedom. The paradoxical position of blackness, as necessary to the construction of liberal modernity, yet excluded from its precepts is apparent in the spectacular forms of violence enacted on the enslaved female body. Whether at the hands of police terror, surveillance, extrajudicial murders, or mass incarceration and the fortification of the prison industrial complex, blackness continues to function as a site of consumption and fodder for White/Settler subjectivity. Here,



afropessimist scholarship pushes us to collectively slow down our assumptive associations and positioning of blackness and racial slavery as merely a laboring force that then becomes assimilated into the settler (or ostensibly (post)colonial) society.

However, the teleological force of afropessimist scholarship has been rightfully critiqued for merely inverting settler colonial scholarships' placement of the quintessential indigenous Other with the enslaved Other. Admittedly, the rethinking of the character of racial slavery from the perspective of afropessimist scholarship does not fundamentally answer Jacksons' provocation of what it means to predicate one's being or subjectivity around a laboring ontology; yet, I would argue that this is a question not merely confined to or reducible to black and other marginalized subjects, but also one that is also a critical point of meditation for indigenous peoples, lest we reproduce uncritical ascriptions of indigenous political projects as *inherently* decolonial. Indigenous scholars such as Glenn Coulthard and Audra Simpson identify the colonial politics of recognition in which many indigenous communities are entangled reproduce and maintain colonial forms of power, which shape indigenous sovereignty struggles.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Wilderson and Sexton have both engaged the vexed question of sovereignty as it relates to Black positionality under conditions of modernity, as neither citizens of the modern nation-state nor sovereign subjects. As Wilderson has argued (2010) the Indigenous subject operates within two distinct modalities under modernity. Through the modality of sovereignty, the "Savage" or part Human indigenous position, articulates with the White/Settler/Human, For Wilderson, the notion of sovereignty itself is predicated on the non-human position of the Black non-being. For Wilderson, it is through the modality of genocide that the indigenous subject articulates with the non-Human position of Blackness. I would argue that this space of the non-Human and genocide sketches the outlines of a space of solidarities. Though he does not explicitly state so, I read this as mirroring increasing calls by indigenous scholars for a "politics of refusal," to move outside of state-indigenous recognition that perpetuate colonial conditions and profound state of what I call *settler unfreedoms*.

Further, the focus on settler subjectivity of black being and becoming in the Caribbean, in part reflects settler colonial scholarship's theoretical blindspots in its analytic focus on the predictable question, "*who is the settler?*," continues what I call incognito investments in whiteness—that is, the elision of antiblackness as an enacted violence upon black peoples as constitutive of and not merely a byproduct of colonialism and settler colonialism, as well as an inattention to antiblackness functions *within* indigenous communities e.g. colonial politics of recognition. The very racial logics that undergird the settler colonial project also shape indigenous political subjectivities. The field of indigenous studies has taken as one of its crucial theoretical points the affirmation of indigenous sovereignty against settler colonial erasure of indigenous peoples as political subjects and indigenous *nations*. Within settler frameworks, racial slavery, in which enslaved Africans became defined by their blackness, figures as a laboring force. Literally birthed from the black female body, articulations of this time-space continue to occur as if the black female body is not central to settler processes of re-placing indigenous peoples and lands.

I would argue then that both of these intellectual trajectories result from the inability to adequately articulate these twin horizons, too often framed as a theoretical impasse and not as mutually constitutive and relational processes, or what Tiffany King (2013) eloquently pinpoints as the dire need for an analytic of "simultaneous vision." King brilliantly maps how enslaved black female bodies functions as "unit of space" in settler colonial expansion. That is, it is not necessarily the labor produced by black bodies, though laboring certainly occurs, but rather it is "their actual bodies that produce the plantation as a space for the Settler to inhabit and self actualize" (2013:7). Their bodily dispossession

that can be deployed for processes of settlement/clearing the land, reconceptualizing conquest and clearing as an ongoing process that allows for dialogue between slavery, capitalism, genocide, and settler colonialism. Importantly, it is the biopolitical capacities of the black female body, or the "space between the legs," that is mined as fungible property for the reproduction of enslaved bodies (McKittrick 2006, 46-47). The black female body comes to constitute "*the* machination of slavery" (ibid). King's attention to the processes of settlement and clearing through the black female body, read the enslaved black female back into conquest.

Though speaking from a US settler context and a racial history that reinscribes a black-white binary, I think it is constructive ground upon which to examine how we might think through the shared, yet distinct terrain of understanding how indigenous and Creole women function as sites of heteropatriarchal capitalist violence. Thus, as an *enslaved* body, who reproduces the condition of slavery to her children, as property and the measure against which indentureship was established, there is a need to slow down our theoretical musings to attend to the specificity of this condition in the Guyanese context. While indigenous presence has been significantly marginalized in Guyana, and subsumed within ethno-political conflicts between African and Indians to secure political control of mechanisms of the state, there has been an erasure of the way this control primarily benefits an elite stratum of Africans and Indians. Within this political domain is fundamentally an erasure of indigenous political voices and interests, but also how antiblackness continues to function across racial/ethnic groups (not only in Guyana) but as a global ideological force that cannot be reduced to the black body. Part of the difficulty of rendering visible

these simultaneous techniques of power and control—indigenous marginalization and antiblackness—is in part due to hegemonic conceptualizations of race and racial logics (in both settler and afropessimist scholarship) as being reducible to “corporeality” of the body, and its “fleshiness.” This line of thinking persists despite longstanding critiques against essentializing notions of race (e.g. Crenshaw et.al 1995; Delgado and Stefancic 2012).

Drawing on the work of phenomenologist, and feminist scholar Sara Ahmed, I argue for the need to think of whiteness, anti-indigeneity, *and* antiblackness as global orientating forces, which offers a means to avoid the reductive analysis of “race as living in phenotypical bodies” offering a more expansive understanding that these ideological forces structure particular bodies in relation to techniques of control, surveillance, and incorporation by the state. It may allow us to see how whiteness, the possessive investment in whiteness and white supremacy, anti-indigeneity, and anti-blackness travel, reconfigure, restructure, and re-entrench itself. Framing the constitutive ideological forces as such, I argue, moves us away from what I call an ‘ontological inevitability’ (which plagues settler colonial and afropessimist scholarship alike) and toward relational frameworks: that is, the ascription of blackness as tethered to colonial logics of labor and as colonial assimilated subjects, and the reduction of black worldviews, geographies, and cosmologies to the space of the perpetual “wretched,” “deathlike monsters” or what McKittrick pinpoints as a “linearity...that is informed by, and inevitably leads to unending black-death” (2013:10).

This is critical not only for thinking about the need to bring blackness back into settler colonial frames, but for rethinking the space of conquest *and* the plantation as simultaneously land-space-time configurations constitutive of (white) settler subjectivity.

In the context of Guyana, undoubtedly, this raises the question of whether settler colonialism adeptly captures the position of blackness *and* indigeneity. I believe that it does not. Further, when we consider the body of the enslaved African woman, as a site of gratuitous violence constructed in relation to the indigenous “buckwoman,” and later, indentured East Indian “coolie” woman, the gendered aspects of dispossession that undergird state machinations and colonial logics and practices becomes clear and is a necessary site of further theorization. It is the interrelated terrain from which we must radically rethink the coordinates and terrain of the Human itself. Thus, my emphasis is on colonial racial logics and ideologies, regimes of legality that structure the contemporary racial, economic, and political geographies of Guyana and have material impacts on the land/body.

The question of rethinking the terrain of the Human is undoubtedly related to the ongoing project of decolonization and the work of uncovering structural conditions that have been relegated as silences of the past (Trouillot 1995). Uncovering these silences is the grounded, muddled disorder of decolonization. Decolonization is not shallow critique, but a transformation in which one is deeply implicated. As Frantz Fanon describes:

Decolonization, which sets out to change the order of the world, is, obviously, a program of complete disorder. But it cannot come as a result of magical practices, nor of a natural shock, nor of a friendly understanding. Decolonization, as we know, is a historical process: that is to say it cannot be understood, it cannot become intelligible nor clear to itself except in the exact measure that we can discern the movements which give it historical form and content (2008: 36, emphasis mine).

Thus, decolonization attends to the material ordering of the world, yet one that is a tenuous, inherently dangerous endeavor. Excavating the ground upon which we collectively stand,

beyond postmodern deconstructionism and charges that identity politics detract from substantive disengagement with capitalism, imperialism, and other “isms,” can be understood to mean divesting ourselves of any political recourse. I would ask that we appreciate the inverse, to inquire of ourselves and each other, what (im)possibilities and capacities might we generate if we embrace a “politics of refusal” of the terrain set by settler systems predicated on our dispossession—corporeal, spiritual, and material? What ground might give way upon unsettling “rational spatial colonization and domination” (McKittrick 2006: x)? What meaningful changes might occur in the social and political relations between peoples and the land? What new forms of knowledge might emerge? Decolonization is also a project of healing the metaphysical and spiritual bodies, of reclaiming the imaginative spaces that have been siphoned the sphere of the political. This is a project that is incomplete, impermanent, illusory, and contested. This is the work the ancestors have transferred to us.

## List of Acronyms

ADF	Amerindian Development Fund
AFC	Alliance for Change
ALT	Amerindian Land Titling Project
APA	Amerindian Peoples Association
APNU	A Partnership for National Unity
EU-FLEGT	European Union
FPIC	Free Prior Informed Consent
GOIP	Guyanese Organization of Indigenous Peoples
GGMC	Guyana Geology and Mines Commission
GFC	Guyana Forestry Commission
LCDS	Low Carbon Development Strategy
REDD+	Reducing Emissions from Deforestation Program
UNDP	United Nations Development Program

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